

BREAD IN THE DESERT

AND OTHER SERMONS

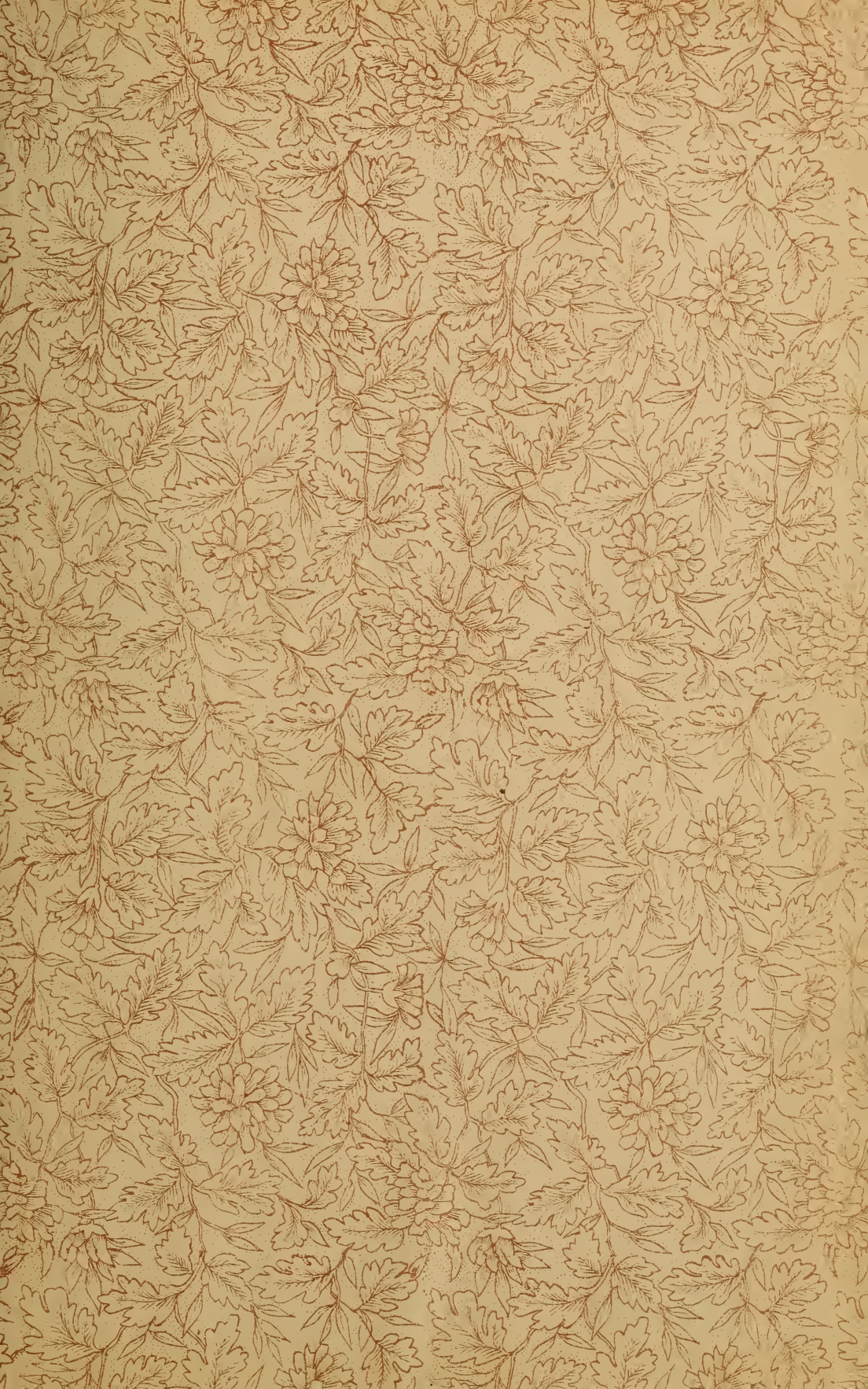
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BREAD IN THE DESERT,

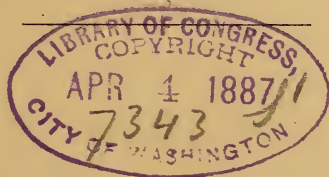
AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY

✓
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NEW YORK:
THOMAS WHITTAKER,
2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE.

1887.

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Franklin Press:
RAND AVERY COMPANY,
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I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

To My Mother,

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MY
UNSPEAKABLE OBLIGATIONS TO HER
TEACHING AND EXAMPLE.

PREFACE.

I give these sermons to the press in obedience to the wishes of my late parishioners of Holy Trinity Church (Harlem), New York,—whom it was my privilege to serve for eleven years,—in the hope that they may be to them a pleasant memorial of our common work for the Master, and an enduring testimony to the truths of His Gospel, which knit together the hearts of Pastor and People in a bond which no changes of time, or place, or circumstance, can sever.

R. H. McK.

Trinity Rectory, New Orleans,

March 3d, 1877.

“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

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SERMONS.

I.

BREAD IN THE DESERT.

"And the angel of the Lord came . . . and touched him, and said, Arise and eat ; because the journey is too great for thee." — 1 KINGS xix. 7.

OF all the figures upon the scene of Israelitish history, the grandest and most romantic is that of Elijah the Tishbite. He divides with Moses the wonder and the glory of the old dispensation, and with Moses appears on the Mount of Transfiguration to witness, in the face of Jesus Christ, the surpassing glory of the new. He is at once the worker of miracles and the beneficiary of them. To-day he is fed by ravens, to-morrow the widow's oil and meal are multiplied for his sake. At his word the heavens refuse their rain for three long, dreary years. And, again, in answer to his prayer, there is a sound of abundance of rain. The lightnings leap from the clouds to do his will — now to consume the sacri-

fice in attestation of its acceptance with Jehovah, now to punish the presumption of an idolatrous king. Even Death yields up his prey to the resistless power of Elijah's prayer.

But he is more than a wonder-worker. It is as a moral hero that he claims our deepest reverence. His courage is equal to his faith; and when the appointed time has arrived, he issues from his concealment, goes straight to the king, who for three years has been hunting his life, and denouncing him as a guilty rebel against Jehovah, faithless to his trust as head of the people of God, bids him summon all Israel to meet him on Mount Carmel. The despotic monarch quails before Elijah, and obeys his word. The prophet's mantle asserts its superiority to the royal purple; and in that scene on Carmel, one sees that the real king is not Ahab with his pomp and power, but Elijah, the solitary hermit of the desert.

Such is the figure of the great prophet, — majestic, commanding, awe-inspiring. But the chapter from which our text is taken shows us a very different manner of man. But yesterday the victorious reformer of Carmel, alone defying king and court, army and priesthood, strong in faith to vindicate the honor and authority of Israel's God, and in his fiery zeal executing the sentence of death on the eight hundred and fifty prophets of

the false and filthy worship of Baal and Ashtaroth — to-day he is a fugitive from Jezebel's vengeance, disheartened and disappointed, broken in spirit, his courage and his faith totally eclipsed. He has fled to the southern border of Judæa ; and from thence he goes alone, a day's journey, into the great white desert, and, sitting down under a juniper-tree, begs, in the bitterness of his spirit, that he may die, saying, "It is enough ; now, O Lord, take away my life ; for I am not better than my fathers." Exhausted by long fatigue and intense excitement and grief, he wraps himself in his mantle of skin, and falls asleep there in the lonely desert under the juniper-tree. "And as he lay and slept . . . behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat ; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

This remarkable scene is suggestive of several reflections, upon which it may be profitable for us to dwell.

1. The first and most obvious is, that the holiest of men are not exempt from periods of spiritual depression and declension. Elijah at Carmel seems removed from us at an unattainable height, far above our experiences, — a hero of the faith too exalted for imitation. But Elijah here in the desert is a man of like passions with us. He who had shut and opened heaven by his faith, now loses faith! He who had so sublimely trusted God, now gives way to fear and despondency and despair! He who had been such a hero in the service of Jehovah, now loses heart, and weakly asks to die!

Now, such an example as this is profitable, because it shows us that it is no strange thing if we sometimes pass through similar periods of spiritual depression. Any one, even the best and bravest servant of Christ, may suddenly find himself in the valley of humiliation, walking in darkness, because faith is temporarily eclipsed. Let him not count it a strange thing, an exceptional experience. It is even the less strange if, like the prophet, he has just been mounting up, as with the wings of the eagle, into a lofty region of faith and zeal. (The law of re-action — partly physical, partly mental — explains many experiences of spiritual depression.) But chiefly such a man learns that the mightiest champion of the faith is mighty only “in the

Lord." The holiest saint or seraph is holy only so long as he abides in Christ. Like the fabled Antæus, who received new strength every time he touched his Mother Earth, and whom Hercules could only overcome by lifting him from the ground, the servant of Christ is invincible so long, and only so long, as he leans upon his God and Saviour. Such experience of depression and declension as befell Elijah in the desert may be first the consequence, and then, by the mercy of God, the cure, of dependence on self. Of both of these truths, there could be no more impressive illustration than is furnished by the narrative before us.

2. But, if this scene in the desert is suggestive on one side of human weakness and frailty, much more does it emphasize on the other hand the divine help which is never far from the people of God. We have here a vivid illustration of the old and trite adage that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Even at the darkest hour of danger, distress, or temptation, God is near His faithful people. At the very lowest point of Elijah's depression, when his faith had suffered eclipse, and when the sense of failure had overwhelmed him, lo, God's angel is at hand to strengthen and encourage him for his journey.

Human life, my brethren, is full of experiences which are essentially, though not externally, simi-

lar to those of the prophet in the desert. I will not stay to seek for historical parallels: they will suggest themselves to every student of history, — parallels to Elijah's loss of faith, as when Archbishop Cranmer fell from his greatness, like a star from heaven, and made his cowardly recantation for fear of the English Jezebel; or as when Henry of Navarre and the Prince of Condé escaped the fury of Catherine de Medici by abjuring the Protestant faith: parallels to the deliverance which came to Elijah, as when our great reformer recovered his courage and his fortitude, and atoned for his weakness by his heroic constancy at the stake, holding in the flames till it was consumed the hand which had signed the recantation, and exclaiming, "This unworthy hand! this unworthy hand!" I will not stop to speak of these, but will rather cite examples from common life.

Here is a faithful man of God, standing in his lot, preaching Christ and Him crucified from one year's end to the other, faithfully bearing witness to the truth as it is in Jesus. He is alone, he is discouraged, he is cast down, and it seems to him that his life is a failure; for though his character stands like a strong pillar conspicuous in his community, and though his pure example shines like a beacon before men, his work is not surrounded by the aureole of success: he is one whose life

is his only eloquence, and whose holiness is his only success, — a man such as he of whom it was written, “He was content to let other men quarrel about Christianity : it was enough for him to live it.” Such a man I see discouraged, cast down, ready, like Elijah, to ask of God to take away his life from the deep and crushing sense of failure.

Or, perhaps, it is a public-spirited citizen, who, filled with a disinterested devotion, has given his time and his energy and his capital to schemes for the enlightenment and welfare of his fellow-men ; but, to all appearance, he has labored in vain. He meets with little or no response ; his plans are not understood, his sacrifices are not appreciated, his motives even are misjudged ; the public cannot rise to his exalted point of view, cannot sympathize as yet with the nobility of his aim ; and so, at last, his brave and unselfish soul is cast down with a sense of failure, and, like the prophet, he sinks into despondency and despair.

Or, again, it is a father or a mother who has striven, by precept and by prayer, by example and by sacrifice, — leaving no stone unturned, no effort untried, — to guide into the paths of virtue and of religion a wayward son, who is dearer than life. But all to no purpose : his boyhood and youth are past, manhood is reached, yet no tokens are seen of any fruitage of so much parental labor ; he is a prodigal

still, feeding his soul upon husks. And so, again, you see the servant of God lying under the juniper-tree in the desert, discouraged, depressed, disheartened, ready even to cry, with the prophet, "It is enough ; now, O Lord, take away my life."

Or, let me take my illustration from this congregation here present. I may speak to some who have honestly striven to lead a godly and a Christian life, and to use their influence and their talents for the promotion of God's glory, but who feel that they have labored to no purpose. You have a sense of isolation. Men have misunderstood you, and held aloof from you, and so your sacrifices seem all in vain, and your work a failure.

There are multitudes of such cases, of such discouragements, which come to faithful men and women treading the dusty highway of this desert of Time. Now I would, by God's grace, bring to every such man a message of encouragement and strength. I would say to such, Let this scene in the desert, the faithful servant, the fearless champion lying there under the juniper-tree, cast down and disheartened, feeling that he is alone, and that God has forsaken him, assure you that it never has been true that any faithful man or woman who has tried to serve God, and to follow Jesus Christ, and to live for the truth,—it never has been true that God has forgotten him or forsaken him. Brethren, suc-

cess is not the test, either of character or of truth. God forbid! Or, what is the same thing, the worldly measures of success, or even the ecclesiastical measures of success, are not the measures whereby the eternal and invincible God, who looketh upon the heart, and not upon the appearance, judges. In fact, it is a very poor thing for us to labor for success: let us rather labor for the truth, let us labor for Christ and His holy cause, leaving the question of success or failure entirely to God. Let us be content to do our duty. Robert E. Lee said well, "Duty is the grandest word in the English language." Let us be content to do our duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us, — to speak for the truth, to labor for the truth, to live for the truth, and, if need be, to die for the truth, whether men will hear, or not, whether we are surrounded by applauding multitudes, or whether we feel, like Elijah, out in the desert alone.

John Stuart Mill, in that masterly treatise of his on Liberty, says, "The dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is one of those pleasant falsehoods which men repeat after one another, till they pass into commonplaces, but which all experience refutes;" and he goes on to give historical instances in which truth, instead of triumphing, has been trampled under foot. But, brethren, while

truth may be trampled to the dust for a while — for a generation — for ages — truth must triumph in the end, for

“Right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win :
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.”

Let us therefore believe that although we may not succeed in planting the banner of truth upon the ramparts of the foe, nevertheless no blow ever struck for the truth, in the fear of God, has been struck in vain. And, moreover, we are never alone. Elijah thought he was alone, thought he was deserted, thought there was none to stand by him in his extremity; and so he seemed, a fugitive in the wilderness, fleeing from a woman's vengeance. There he lies under the juniper-tree, exhausted by fatigue: but, while he thinks himself alone, the air is filled with the angels of God all around him; and one of them, commissioned from on high, touches the sleeper, and awakes him, and shows him that God has made provision for his wants, even there in the desert. Men and women, partakers with me of this mortal nature, partakers with me of the cares and temptations and difficulties of life, how often is it true that we feel depressed and discouraged because we think God has forgotten us! But it is not so: we are never alone, — never in any

work for God, never in any testimony for the truth, never in any battle for the right, never in any suffering, any sacrifice, are we, or can we be, alone. There was One who was alone : there was One who suffered all alone, misunderstood, despised, rejected of men, even His own chosen disciples entirely unable to appreciate Him, or understand His ministry or His mission. Jesus Christ was alone ; but because He was alone, and because He trod the winepress alone, — the winepress of human sorrow, — for that very reason no servant of Christ ever has been, or ever can be, alone. The apostle says, — and says, oh, so truly ! — “ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors. . . . For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And the humblest and lowliest and weakest servant of Christ is as dear to His heart as even so great an apostle as St. Paul. It was an angel’s voice and an angel’s touch which waked Elijah, and showed him the provision for his comfort and refreshment ; and, brethren, angels’ voices sound in the gospel of Christ, and angel

ministries are connected with it. An angel announced His coming, another angel brought the story of His birth on the wonderful night to the shepherds on the hills of Judæa; and lo, the heavens suddenly burst forth with song and with light, as the angels strike their harps to the hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." And Jesus teaches that He Himself fulfils in His own person and ministry the ideal of that ladder that Jacob saw, the bottom of which rested on the earth, and the top of which reached to heaven, and on which the angels of God were continually ascending and descending in their ministries and messages of mercy to man. Jesus Christ, then, is to us the medium whereby the ministry of angels is secured for His people, so that even in this respect there is a parallel between the gospel of Christ and its provision of mercy, and that scene that occurred in the desert, when the angel touched Elijah, and awoke him to see that God had spread a table for him in the desert.

"Still through the cloven skies they come, with peaceful
wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary
world.
Above its sad and lowly plains, they bend on hovering
wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds the blessed angels
sing.

O ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending
 low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and
 slow,
Look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the
 wing!
Oh, rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!"

3. But my text is suggestive of another truth of wider application: Man needs spiritual food to fit him for the journey of life. Elijah had before him a long journey on foot through that terrible desert, a journey of two hundred miles. Roots and berries were the only support that he could expect to find, and these were not sufficient to sustain even his iron frame, accustomed as it was to exposure and hardship; and so as the Lord had given manna to His people in that desert, now again He provides angels' food for the support of His servant. And the angel touched him, and said, "Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee."

Now, it is not far to seek to find a parable in this of the great truth that man, being a spiritual being, requires spiritual food, — a food which is not sold in the marts of this world, which is not found in the gardens of pleasure, or in the porches of science, or philosophy, or literature, or in the arena of ambition, or even in the enchanted groves

of love, but is given by God only, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is that spiritual food. Christ is that spiritual provision for the wants of our humanity which meets every requirement and every longing of the soul, and which alone meets them. Men and brethren, believe me, the journey of life is "too great" for you without this spiritual food that God has provided. I care not how strong and sturdy you may be ; I care not how self-reliant ; I care not how eager to face the difficulties and to overcome the dangers that encompass you ; there can be no question of the fact, that the journey of human life, with its temptations, with its cares, with its anxieties, with its sorrows, is too great for thee. The roots and berries that this desert world affords are not sufficient to sustain thee. Neither in pleasure, nor in ambition, nor in any of the occupations that interest and stimulate the human mind, is there to be found a supply of that which the soul needs, — needs most deeply. There is a longing in every human heart after perfection, which finds its fulfilment only in God. There is a cry out of every human life for rest, which finds its answer only in God. There is a yearning after the perfect and the ideal in every human soul, no matter how sinful it may be, that finds its satisfaction only in God. Sometimes this hunger of the soul becomes,

oh so strong! sometimes this thirst of the heart becomes, oh so consuming! There is nothing that can meet, nothing that can satisfy it, save the love of God, realized in Christ Jesus our Lord; and I am here in the name of God to point to the divinely made provision for human salvation, and for the supply of these wants of the soul, — the provision made in Jesus Christ, — and to say to you, as the angel said to Elijah, “All things are ready: arise and eat; for the journey is too great for thee.”

In Correggio's great picture of the Nativity, in the Dresden gallery, the darkness is illumined, and every figure on the canvas made visible, by the light which flashes from the face and brow of the infant Christ. Such is human life: all is darkness and tangle and mystery until the light shines forth upon it from the face of Him who was born in Bethlehem, and of whom the angel said, “Call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” This is the promise of the Gospel. And the proof follows hard upon the promise. Jesus Christ cries, “I am the light of the world;” and presently you see Him proving the truth of this claim, by opening the eyes of the blind. He cries, “I am the bread of life;” and presently you see Him realizing this promise, by feeding the famishing multitude in the desert. He cries, “I am the

good shepherd ;” and presently you see Him stooping to lift up the fallen woman, who crouched in tears at His feet, and giving her rest and absolution and peace. He cries, “I am the resurrection and the life ;” and presently you see Him standing by the grave of Lazarus, and summoning the dead to life again. And though our eyes have not looked upon these miracles in the physical sphere, though we have seen Him do none of these wondrous works, have we not seen Him work miracles in the spiritual sphere? Have we not seen Him give light to those who were in moral darkness, and call out of the graves of sin and vice those who were lying dead in trespasses and sins? In other words, have we not seen the promises which He makes to the world realized in many a heart, and in many a life, and in many a home?

Oh for a touch of the angel’s hand to-night, to awaken the sorrowing sleepers on this desert of time, to see the heavenly feast of love and grace provided for them in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Brethren, mine is only the faltering tongue of a sinful man, and the untutored touch of one like yourselves: but at least I can speak to you as one who has felt the same need that you feel, who has confronted the same difficulties by which you have been perplexed, who has been tried and tempted in the same pathway that you are tread-

ing, and who has found in Christ deliverance and rest and spiritual refreshment; and, therefore, I can perhaps press this truth upon you with as much success as though it were not my touch, but the touch of an angel from God, that was laid upon you to awaken you to feel your need of the salvation that is in Christ. God grant it of His infinite mercy!

II.

“WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?”

“*Where is the promise of His coming?*” — 2 PETER iii. 4.

First Sermon.

THIS, the apostle tells us, would be the question of the “scoffers” who should come “in the last days.” This has been the question wherewith ungodly and unbelieving men have, these eighteen centuries and more, taunted the Christian Church. The Nazarene bade His followers expect to see His “sign” in the heavens, heralding His second coming with power and great glory; and when He ascended into heaven, angelic messengers (so the story runs) gave assurance to His disciples that “this same Jesus who is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

Accordingly we find that this expectation of the second advent was cherished with ardor and constancy by the early Christians. It formed part of the warp and woof of the preaching of apostles and evangelists. It entered into the very centre

and substance of the faith once delivered. They kept in mind the words of their Master, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” They remembered the solemn parable of the ten virgins and the warning it contained to watch for the coming of the Bridegroom, that they might be ready to go out and meet him, at whatever hour he might come. When they preached to the heathen, and warned them to turn from their idols, and “to serve the living and true God,” they failed not to add, as a part of the Christian faith and calling, “and to wait for His Son from heaven.” When an apostle poured out his devout thanksgiving to God for the progress of his converts in holiness, he named, as the crown of all their gifts, or, at least, as the condition of their attainment, that they were “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He can ask for his children in the faith nothing higher than this: “The Lord direct your hearts into . . . the patient waiting for Christ.” He can suggest no mightier instrumentality for raising men to a sober, righteous, and godly life than this, that they should look for “that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus

Christ.” Lying in a Roman dungeon, and expecting speedy execution at the hands of the tyrant, he cheers himself by the hope of a “crown of righteousness” at the hands of the Judge, which shall be given, however, not to him only, but to all that “love His appearing.”

And not “the blessed and glorious Paul” only, but all the apostles and early Christians, pointed their hearers to the heavens, and bade them expect the coming of the Son of man. We “look for” and “haste unto” “the coming of the day of God,” exclaims St. Peter; and St. Jude, in his brief letter, makes constant allusion to the day predicted by Enoch, the seventh from Adam, saying, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints.” St. John, too, in his old age, when the crown of martyrdom was waiting for him, writes to the seven churches, “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him.” To crown all, the canon of the New Testament closes with the promise of the Lord Jesus, “Surely, I come quickly,” and the fervent response of His waiting Church, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Such was, and such indeed has ever been, the attitude of the Church of Christ. Above the din and tumult of the changes and conflicts of centuries has risen ever the voice of her steadfast confession

“I believe in Jesus Christ . . . Who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Meanwhile the stream of time has flowed on uninterruptedly, and the scroll of human history has steadily unfolded itself from generation to generation until nearly nineteen centuries have run their course; yet still the sign of the Son of man is not seen, nor the sound of His approaching chariot-wheels heard. And so the scoffer rises up, and asks with scorn, “Where is the promise of His coming?” He points, as St. Peter predicted he would, to the uniformity of natural law as a refutation of the hope and expectation of the Christian Church. “See,” he cries: “unchanging order reigns in nature. ‘All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.’ Where, then, is there any room for the great catastrophe which you expect? Experience has shown that this expectation is a dream and a delusion.”

What answer have we to this question? — which indeed is not asked only by the scoffer, for it finds an echo in many a Christian heart, perplexed by the long delay in the realization of the ideal of Christ’s kingdom, and in the fulfilment of the promise of the second advent.

There is an incident in our Lord's life which will help us to an answer. After the transfiguration in which Moses and Elias had appeared with Jesus in glory, the disciples came unto Him, saying, "Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?" He answered, "Elias is come already, and they knew him not." "Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist." In other words, the great prophecy of Malachi with which the Old-Testament canon closes — "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" — met its fulfilment in the mission and ministry of John the Baptist, the young prophet of the desert, who came clad in the austere guise which the great seer of Carmel had worn, and whose whole work was "in the spirit and power of Elias."

And yet John himself when asked, "Art thou Elias?" answered, "I am not." Our Lord, too, implies the same thing when He says, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things." And a due consideration of the words of Malachi — which connect the coming of Elias with the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment — will show that the mission of John does not exhaust that prediction, — does not complete its fulfilment. John, therefore, *was* Elias, and yet he was *not*. He was Elias in spirit and in power. He

was not Elias in person. He fulfilled the words of Malachi, but only in part. They yet await their final and complete fulfilment.

Now apply the principle here exemplified to the second advent of Christ, and you have at once an answer to the question, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Christ is come already, and they knew Him not. The promise has already been fulfilled. Howbeit, it yet awaits its final and complete fulfilment, when He shall come in person. Of that glorious advent, indeed, men scoffingly ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” But we hold that “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise;” — and surely a scientific age ought to be the last to dispute the position. Of this we shall speak on a future occasion. To-day we confine ourselves to those partial fulfilments at which we have hinted.

Now, the eye of faith, if it scan attentively the history of the Christian era, will find certain great crises when the Son of man has come “in spirit and power,” though not in person.

Such a crisis was the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, prophesied so fully by Himself, and realized in such appalling scenes of anguish as perhaps the world had never witnessed before. The long-gathering storm of the divine wrath burst then upon the guilty nation. The judgment long treasured up by a series of rebellious acts was

at last poured out upon that wicked generation. Titus was the Imperator of the Roman armies which shut in the devoted city as with a wall of glittering steel. But a greater than Titus ordered the course of events. The Son of Man presided over the storm-cloud which broke at last in fury, and swept away with its destroying might, city and temple and polity. It was a time of judgment, and Christ was the Judge. It was a time of revolution, far-reaching in its results, profound in its significance for the future of the world and the race; and Christ was He whose hand guided its course. The windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up. A destroying deluge was on the land; and out of it was to emerge a New Earth, a New Civilization, a New History,—in short, the regeneration of Society and Man.¹

And as in this, so in other great critical periods of history. Men ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” We answer by pointing to the conversion of the Roman Empire, when “the sign of the Son of man” was seen, if not in the heavens, in that bright cross which, according

¹ Strangely enough, the Jews themselves had a legend to that effect: “He came, according to another wild legend, on the day of the destruction of Jerusalem, but was suddenly carried away, to be revealed at His proper time.”

to the legend, gave to Constantine his omen of victory, yet most certainly in the famous Edict of Toleration and in the submission of the Roman eagles to the symbol of Christianity. We answer again by pointing to the victories of the cross over the Northern barbarians, which signalized the next great advance of the religion of Jesus, when the torrent which swept away the last bulwarks of the Roman Empire was subdued and calmed by the voice of the Son of man, — as of old on Gennesaret, under the mighty spell of the same voice, the winds ceased, and the waves were still. We answer yet again by pointing to the humiliations which befell the Church when, forsaking the precepts of her Lord, and forgetting of what spirit she was, she armed herself with the pomp and power of this world, and leaned upon an arm of flesh, only to provoke the judgments of that same Jesus whom John saw in Patmos, whose eyes were as a flame of fire, and whose feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace, and out of whose mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword.

“Where is the promise of His coming?” We answer once more by pointing to the throes of the great Reformation period, when, heralded by a new John the Baptist, announced by the voice of a new Elijah in the persons of Grossetete and Wickliffe and Cobham and Huss and Luther and Tyndale,

the Son of Man, “the Messenger of the covenant,” “suddenly came to His temple,” — came “like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap,” came and sat “like a refiner and purifier of silver,” purging away the dross of long-accumulating corruptions, both of doctrine and of morals, and once more making His house an house of prayer for all nations.

“Where is the promise of His coming?” My brethren, if you read the history of the last hundred years aright, you will not lack an answer. Did He not come in the eighteenth century, in that great awakening which swept over England like the life-giving wind over the dry bones of the valley, when again the Lord came to His temple, sending as His forerunners that goodly company of reformers which sprang out of the bosom of the Church of England, — Whitefield and Wesley, Grimshaw and Romaine, Hervey and Fletcher and Venn, Wilberforce and Law?

And has He not come again in our own time in that great movement of missionary zeal and labor, which, beginning in that little cloud no bigger than a man’s hand which was first seen about the beginning of this century, has grown and spread till it has poured its refreshing showers over a vast area of our earth? Yes: again Elijah has prayed, and again the Lord has answered; and the result

has been a wider diffusion of the gospel, accompanied by more signal victories than at any previous period of the history of the Church. While we, grown lukewarm and unbelieving under the influence of the cares and riches and pleasures of this world, and forgetting (alas!) that self-sacrifice and the cross are the necessary conditions of true discipleship — while we, I say, are discussing the evidences of Christianity, and, in the weakness of our faith, trembling for the result of the great conflict with the unbelief of our time, the Son of man is actually claiming “the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.”

These are only examples — and they feebly traced in outline — of the truth which I would enforce. All modern history is full of illustrations of it. The centuries since Christ have heard the voice and seen the sign of the Son of man, not once or twice, but many times.

The rapt seer of Patmos Isle saw in vision a scroll-book “in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne;” it was “written within and without,” — i.e., it contained a completed record; and it was “sealed with seven seals,” — i.e., it was full of mystery, dark and difficult of comprehension.

That book seems to have been the history — the completed history — of the providential government of the world, as it shall stand when the con-

summation of human history shall have filled up the last blank on the mighty scroll. It rests in the hand “of Him that sitteth upon the throne;” because He, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, holds all events in the hollow of His hand, and by His providence directs the evolution of history. But, ah, it is a sealed — a seven-sealed — book. Who can loose the seals, and open the scroll, and decipher its contents? The voice of the “strong angel” resounds over the wide earth, and down the long corridor of the ages, and through the mighty vault of heaven, — but in vain. “No man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.” Yes, the philosophy of human history mocks us like a mirage of the desert. God’s ways are dark; His providence is a seven-sealed mystery; and we might sit down and weep, like the seer in the vision, because no man can break its seals for us, and decipher its contents. We *might*, had not “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” “prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.” But He — by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by His glorious resurrection and ascension, and by the coming of the Holy Ghost — has won the victory which enables Him to open and read the book for us. Christ and His cross, my brethren, loose the seven seals of the history of God’s

providence, which is the history of man. They will at last explain all its riddles, and unravel all its mysteries, and clear up all its dark and difficult problems; and the universe shall ring with the loud acclaim of praise of angels and redeemed saints, and of every creature in it, when the Lamb of God shall take the book, and open the seals, and display before all eyes the beauty and the order of human history in its onward march to its final goal. Meanwhile, we may learn, with Johann von Müller, that the cross of Christ is the key to the interpretation of history; and, as we study it more and more diligently, we shall reverently discern in many a period “the sign of the Son of man.” We shall see that He has come, not the second time only, but many times, to the world and to the Church, and that His great promise has fulfilled itself in many ways.

Nor will we stop here. We will study the book of our own history. Ah, how often this is indeed a seven-sealed scroll to us! and how vainly do we seek to loose the seals thereof, that we may read its meaning! Of this, too, we shall find the key only in Christ and His cross. A docile and humble spirit, reverently asking the interpretation of the closely-written scroll of human experiences, will find here, too, — in sorrows, in afflictions, in losses, in bereavements, — “the sign of the Son of man,”

and in many a lurid cloud of earthly disappointment discover the symbol and omen of moral victory—even that victory “which overcometh the world.” And when men scornfully ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” our heart will answer, “Ah, He has fulfilled it many times to me, and each time He has left a blessing, whether He came in sunshine or in storm ; and at last, He will gloriously fulfil His promise, coming in the guise of the angel of Death, and receiving me unto Himself, that where He is, there I may be also.”

III.

“WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?”

“Where is the promise of His coming?” — 2 PETER iii. 4.

Second Sermon.

THIS question expresses, on the one hand, the scorn of an unbelieving world, mocking at the hope of the Church; and, on the other, the perplexity of the Church herself, as she counts up the long cycles of time since the promise was given, and scans the eastern heavens in vain to discover “the sign of the Son of man.”

I showed you last Sunday where to look for an answer to this question, and a solution of this perplexity. You were reminded that the promise of the coming of Christ, like that of the coming of Elijah, though it looked ultimately to a personal advent, did not look only to that, but fulfilled itself mediately in the evolution of human history. And certain great crises in the course of the centuries since Christ were pointed out as instances of the fulfilment of the great promise, when the Lord Jesus did come again, not indeed in person, but “in spirit and power.”

Such a view as this throws a flood of light upon the page of history, while at the same time it teaches us to look reverently for “the sign of the Son of man,” and for the revelation of His power and glory, not merely in the consummation of all things, but all along the course of human affairs. From this stand-point we shall see Christ “fulfilling Himself in many ways” in the past history of our race. We shall recognize His Hand in the events of our own time,¹ and we shall expect to discover the unfolding of His purposes in the future evolution of the great drama of history. Thus the promise will belong at once to the past, the present, and the future. “By divers portions, and in divers manners,” the Lord Jesus has already come. He is coming to the world and to the Church, not doubtfully, in our own time, if we have discernment to see His “sign.” He will yet come, in the near or distant future, working out His vast and far-reaching plan for the regeneration of society and of man.

But is this all that the promise implies? Does this view, important and pregnant as it is, exhaust the meaning of the second advent?

¹ Four centuries after Christ, the Talmudist says of the Jewish hope of Messiah what might be truly said of the Christian hope of the advent, — “He is even now sitting among the poor and wounded at the gates of Rome, and men know Him not.”

No, for the angel said that He should “so come in like manner as” He was seen to go into heaven ; and we know that that was an objective fact occurring in the sphere of the physical and external world. We know also that He shall come in such wise that “every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him.” With the early Christians, then, we look for a visible, personal advent of Jesus Christ to our earth,—the antithesis of the Incarnation ; not in weakness and “great humility,” but “in power and great glory ;” not to suffer, but to reign ; not to be despised and rejected, but to be worshipped and glorified ; not to make reconciliation on a cross of agony, but to dispense final justice from a throne of glory.

But when we make this confession, immediately there rises the old question, “Where is the promise of His coming ?” For all these long centuries of the Christian era have passed away, and still He comes not. Surely, “The Lord is slack concerning His promise !” Time itself seems to mock the Christian’s hope. The Church has been standing gazing up into heaven well-nigh two thousand years, and saying, “Come, Lord Jesus ;” but to what purpose ? Its experience has been similar to that of the prophets of Baal on a memorable occasion : there has been “no voice, nor any that answered.” And, moreover, Nature seems to

declare the fundamental unreasonableness of any such crisis or catastrophe as the Christian Church anticipates; for “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” The stars have quietly moved on in their vast cycles; the sun has run his daily course unwearied; the tides have ebbed and flowed; seed-time and harvest, winter and summer, have continued in their perpetual round; the whole grand system of Nature has remained steadfast and unchanged in its ever-recurring succession.

The objection — or perhaps I should say the difficulty — is, you perceive, twofold. One phase of it we may call the historical difficulty; the other, the scientific.

Let us take these in their reverse order, and seek a solution of them.

I. *The Scientific Difficulty.* — This would require a separate treatment; and it is not my purpose to try to meet it in this discourse, but I may hint at the line of thought in which the answer is to be found.

So far as the objection relates to the delay of the second advent, it would seem that, in a scientific age like the present, it should least of all have weight. For the history of the earth, as related by geology, and the history of the cosmical system, as related by astronomy, present periods so vast,

that the eighteen hundred years, during which Christianity has been evolving its work among men, shrink into utter insignificance in the comparison. Certainly, the man of science, above all other men, should recognize the utter inadequacy of human standards of time as measures of the development of the plans of the Creator.

And, again, so far as the objection relates to other aspects of the subject, such as the regularity and immutability of natural law, which, it is alleged, forbid any such catastrophe as the end of the world, I suggest, —

First, That creation is the fundamental fact on which all our knowledge rests. Science is compelled to admit the beginning of the Kosmos. The very principle of evolution, which, in some form or other, is now generally adopted as a twin generalization with gravitation, carries with it the idea of a beginning. Even if the Kosmos had been self-evolved, the seed out of which it evolved itself must be assumed. But does not this suggest that it is working toward an end? an ultimate solution?

I suggest, secondly, that the three leading ideas involved in the second advent, and that which is associated with it, at least in perspective, the end of the world, find clear analogies in the latest theories of science.

(a) The second advent involves the idea of the inauguration of a higher stage of life and being for man, — emancipation from old fetters, the ascent to a higher plane, the taking on a new body with new powers, and under new and higher conditions. But this is just in the line of the story which science is telling us — whether in astronomy, or in geology, or in natural history, or in sociology, — the several spheres in which the law of evolution is traced. We meet everywhere the same law of progress, from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, from the imperfect to the more perfect. Nature, through all geological time, the evolutionist tells us, struggled slowly upward to reach its final term in man. Her motto would seem to have been, “I press toward the mark.”

(b) The second advent involves the sudden manifestation of the Son of God, and a new birth of the world resulting from it.

But, again, the scientific man at our side teaches us that the ascent of matter and force to higher planes, though indeed in orderly succession, has not been by infinite gradation as upon a sliding scale, but always by paroxysms. The story of the chemist is a story of successive births of force into higher and higher forms, the transformations of dead into living matter, of physical into chemical force, and again of chemical into vital force. These

are all instances of sudden births into higher conditions, with new properties and powers which could not have been imagined before.

(c) The second advent — or that great event which, in the perspective, is contiguous with it, though in reality it may lie far beyond it (like two distant peaks, which seem to spring from the same base, though a wide valley really intervenes) — involves also stupendous natural phenomena, — the regeneration by fire, the new heavens and the new earth.

But here again the analogy of science is in harmony with the scriptural revelation ; for the geologist, in telling of an internal treasure-house of fire, as well as the astronomer in his theory of “planetary old age,” clearly establish that harmony. And, moreover, if there is a law of conservation of force, there is also, as its antithesis, a law of dissipation of energy. To use the language of a living scientist, “All scientific speculations on the subject of the final destiny of the Kosmos bankrupt nature. The final result is “the running down of all forms of force into heat, and the final equal diffusion of this heat, and so the final death of the Kosmos.”¹

II. *The Historical Difficulty.* — Christ promised to come again in person to judge the world. He

¹ Le Conte, *Princeton Review*, 1878, p. 802.

said, “Behold, I come quickly.” But He has not come. Long cycles of history have rolled round, yet still He comes not.

Now, how do we meet this objection? Exactly as St. Peter met it when he made this epistle; viz., by reminding the objector that with the Lord “a thousand years are as one day.” He is the strong and patient worker. Men are impatient. They say, as of old they said to the prophet, — “Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now” (Jer. xvii. 15); or as to Ezekiel, “The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth” (xii. 22); or as to Isaiah, “Let Him make speed, and hasten His work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!” (v. 19). To this unbelieving impatience, the voice of the prophet answered of old, “The vision is for the appointed time, and it hasteneth to the end, and it deceiveth not: though it delay, wait for it; for it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. ii. 3).¹ And before him the Psalmist rebuked this profane cavil, when he exclaimed, “Lord, . . . before the mountains were brought forth, and Thou gavest birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to dust; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand

¹ See Translation of Benjamin Davies, Ph.D., LL.D.

years in Thy sight are as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night” (xc. 1-4). And the voice of Elihu is to the same purpose: “Behold, God is exalted in His power: who teacheth like Him? . . . Remember that thou magnify His work, which men celebrate; all men look at it; man beholdeth it afar off. Behold, God is great, and we know Him not, nor can the number of His years be searched out. . . . Stand still, and consider the wonderful works of God. . . . Teach us what we shall say unto Him: we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. . . . Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out” (Job xxxvi. 22-26; xxxvii. 14, 19, 22, 23).¹

This is the witness of Scripture concerning the ways and the works of the Almighty. It does not stand alone. The voice and the verdict of history are to the same effect; for this historical objection finds its answer and its refutation in history itself. Whether we study the record of races or of civilizations, the conclusion is the same, — that the God who orders the course of history does indeed reckon “a thousand years as one day,” maturing His purposes through long tracts of time, and refusing to hasten His work in obedience to the impatience of men. Great nations are not born in a day; strong civilizations are not the product

¹ See Translation of Benjamin Davies, Ph.D., LL.D.

of a generation ; both are rather the resultant of a combination of forces and influences whose origin must be sought in remote antiquity.

Take the great ruling races of modern Europe to-day,—the English, the German, the French, for instance. Their growth to power and high intellectual vigor runs through many centuries. Their infancy must be sought in the remote period when the fierce tribes of barbarians broke in upon Europe from the north, and devastated the Roman Empire ; their adolescence covered hundreds of years ; their maturity is hardly more than now attained ; their old age may yet be many generations in the future.

What is true of nations, is even more true of civilizations. These, both ancient and modern, have attained their full development only after the lapse of vast periods of time. The roots of our modern civilization strike down beneath the remotest ages. Judæa and Greece and Rome, and even Egypt and Chaldæa, contributed each their share of influence to its development. Christianity nourished and stimulated it, and first gave it vigorous growth.

Judging, then, from the analogy of history, what should be the case with Christianity? Here was a new spiritual kingdom set up on earth, designed to be as wide as the world, and as universal as

man. How would its results be reached? Surely we should expect that such a design could only be wrought out through long cycles of time;—or, at least, this is certain: leaving out of view what *could* be done (for who shall limit the power of the Almighty?) if experience shall prove that the kingdom of Christ is to establish itself slowly and through long ages of development, this is only what the analogy of history would lead us to expect.

Christianity came into the world, a new social and moral force, generating a new civilization. If we are to judge by the analogy of other social and moral forces, and other civilizations, we should expect it to ask thousands of years for maturing its work. Indeed, the words of its founder suggest such a method of development. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which slowly permeates the whole mass. Again, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, . . . which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." When, therefore, men ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" we answer by pointing to the open page of history,—the history of races and of civilizations,—and showing how, in both, the plans and purposes of

the eternal Jehovah have moved to their goal through centuries and cycles of slow development.

We answer again by pointing in particular to the history of the Jewish people. What a record is that! — centuries of training in Egyptian bondage; a generation of trial and discipline in the wilderness of Sinai; centuries again of alternate triumph and humiliation in the Land of Promise; then a long exile and captivity under Chaldæan and Persian masters; then a partial restoration to their own land, chastened and humbled by their reverses; then long vassalage to Grecian rule, and a wide dispersion through the centres of Grecian life; then the fierce persecution of Antiochus, followed by successful rebellion and the re-establishment of the kingdom under the Maccabees; finally, the Roman dominion and influence. And all this checkered experience of the nation through these sixteen centuries had a purpose and a meaning. Jehovah was training and educating His people by these varied experiences, and under these diverse influences, in preparation for the gospel. The Jews were to be the educators of the world. Jerusalem was to be the fountain of a new civilization. In Zion was to be laid the foundation of a new kingdom, which was to realize the dream of a universal empire; only the kingdom was to be spiritual, and

the empire was to be in the hearts of men. Judæa was to produce a Peter, a Paul, a John ; and such fruit was worth all those centuries of education, for those men were to be the benefactors and illuminators of the whole human race. We point to all this as additional evidence of the method of the divine working, and as a reason for checking the presumption which carps at the long delay of His promise.

Once more we point to the record which the page of sacred history contains of the promise of the first advent of the Messiah, cherished with undying tenacity, with inextinguishable hope, by a nation of people through all the reverses and trials of their wonderful history, — a promise which was coeval with the earliest traditions of history, which was reiterated again and again, yet for forty centuries received no literal fulfilment. Here was a case in which the scoffers might say, with even greater show of reason, “Where is the promise of His coming?” But at length in the fulness of time it was fulfilled of a truth in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Looking at this, we feel no difficulty in the delay of the second advent, and no perplexity in the question, “Where is the promise of His coming?” but confidently anticipate the fulness of the time — whether it take ten years or ten thousand

years to ripen — when the Son of man will come the second time according to His word.

But does not this slow ripening of the great periods of history and civilization, while it removes the difficulty occasioned by the long delay of the second advent, create at the same time a presumption against the manner of its inauguration? The Scripture picture represents a sudden event, a great crisis and catastrophe in the history of the world, in the second coming of Christ. But this, too, finds its frequent analogies in history. The records of mankind afford instances not a few of great crises in the history of cities and nations and races, when sudden destruction has overtaken them, when the long pent-up clouds of wrath have burst upon them, and swept them away from among the families of the earth. Such was the case with Nineveh and Babylon. Such was the case with Accad, a city which was older than either of these, which was indeed the cradle of civilization, but which so utterly disappeared, that its existence was not even known forty years ago, and was only brought to light by the discovery of the key to the arrow-headed characters, in which the story of the Accadians, with their laws and literature and religion, had remained securely locked up for more than three thousand years. Such was the case with Jerusalem, which, when it had filled up

the measure of its guilt, perished in that sudden storm of indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Such was the case with the Roman Empire, when it sank to rise no more before the devastating flood of the Northern barbarians. Similar examples are not wanting in modern history, illustrating the principle in question, and giving ground for the assertion that the analogy of history is in harmony with the prophecy that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, — a Day of judgment and indignation and wrath to those who are disobedient and rebellious against the Son of God, but a Day of Redemption to all them that wait for His appearing.

In conclusion, brethren, let me say that if our eyes are illumined by faith, we shall study the great scroll of history under the conviction that it is not a mere fortuitous congeries of battles and sieges and tumults, a mere record of the rivalries and conflicts of races and dynasties, without any organic unity, and without any deeper meaning than appears on the surface, but that it is the unfolding of a divine plan, the evolution of a divine order, proceeding on a definite principle, and moving to a definite end. We shall indeed be far from being able to loose all its seals of mystery, or to interpret all its dark enigmas. But in Christ and His Cross, we shall have the key to its inter-

pretation ; and more and more as we study it, it will take form and proportion as a great providential order. It will be like some splendid statue, which is slowly unveiled before our eyes ; and as the veil is gradually lifted, from the feet upward, and the harmony of its proportions and the beauty of its idea revealed, we shall perceive that the sculptor who has fashioned it throughout is none other than God Himself.

We shall see, moreover, that all history before Christ was one long course of education and preparation for His first advent, and that all history since Christ has been likewise a preparation for His second advent. And, as we watch the slow unfolding of the great scroll, we shall look for the evidence of a fuller preparation, till the time shall be ripe for His coming. Meanwhile we shall remember that we have each our part to do in the work of preparing the way of the Lord. The tiny coral insect toils on beneath the sea, giving not only his labor, but his body, to build up the island, which at length appears above the surface, and becomes a site for cities and a centre of civilization. So may each of us, in our humble sphere, contribute to the great work which is silently going on in preparing the world for the second coming of Christ ; and if *our* eyes see Him not when He comes, we shall at least have the satisfaction

of knowing in death that we have done something towards the upbuilding of the new earth, which shall be the home of righteousness and peace.

Or, if so be that the Son of man come in *our* time, then shall we hail His coming with joy, saying in the words of the prophet, to which we have listened this morning, “Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for Him, and He will save us : this is the Lord ; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation ” (Isa. xxv. 9).

IV.

DESIGN IN NATURE.

“That which may be known of God is manifest in them ; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”—
ROMANS i. 19, 20.

ANOTHER, and probably more accurate, rendering of St. Paul's words here is as follows : “The knowledge of God is manifest within them ; for God manifested it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by means of His works, even His eternal power and divinity.”

St. Paul here declares two things, — first, that the knowledge of God is innate in man, “written on his heart ;” and second, that this knowledge or consciousness of God is developed (called out of latency into patency, out of quiescence into activity) by the contemplation of the works of God in creation. He asserts, moreover, that this knowledge takes a definite form in a clear per-

ception of certain of the attributes of God. The visible creation, he declares, clearly manifests the eternal power of Him that created it; that is, it exhibits a power which is not only vast and colossal, but plainly superhuman, supernatural, "*eternal*." To all this the apostle adds a further assertion, which must not be overlooked. The works of creation, in revealing the eternal power, also reveal the "divinity" of their author. They testify not doubtfully or obscurely to the reflecting mind of man, that the hand which framed them is *divine*.

These assertions of St. Paul, I need scarcely say, are not peculiar to him, or to the writers of the New Testament, or to the Sacred Scriptures. Very similar statements are to be found in pagan writers. To give a single example out of many, Cicero declares (Tusc. Disp. I. xiii. 30) that no tribe of men has ever been known, however fierce, however savage, whose mind has not been imbued with some conception of the Deity: wrong ideas of God, he says, are indeed common, but all have some notion of a divine power. And he adds (29) that in the most primitive state of man, this knowledge of God is derived from the instructions of nature, — *natura admonente cognoverant*.

Passing from pagan writers to those Jewish writers whose productions, though not included in the canon, are yet read occasionally in our churches, as containing venerable and salutary lessons of conduct,—I refer, of course, to the Apocrypha,—we find a remarkable parallel to this passage of the Christian apostle, in the Book of Wisdom: “Surely, vain are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know Him that is: neither by considering the works did they acknowledge the work-master. . . . Let them know how much better the Lord of them is: for the first author of beauty hath created them. But if they were astonished at their power and virtue, let them understand by them how much mightier He is that made them. For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably, the maker of them is seen.”

It is not, however, until we open the Sacred Scriptures that we find this consciousness of God in Nature developed in its highest degree. The Book of Psalms, for example, is redolent with the thoughts expressed here by the apostle, and radiant with passages of sublimest imagery in which they seek utterance. The Psalmist could read the image and superscription of the great King upon the whole circle of physical phenomena: when he

sees the sun rising over the Mount of Olives, and gilding all the towers and minarets of the Holy City with glory, he exclaims, "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to praise Thee." "The day is Thine, and the night is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth."

When he gazes up into the blue vault above him, and contemplates its grandeur, he cries, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork." "Magnify Him that rideth upon the heavens as it were upon an horse; praise Him in His name JAH, and rejoice before Him:" "Who sitteth in the heavens, over all from the beginning." When he looks out upon the sea over which a storm is sweeping, he breaks out into this sublime strain of adoration: "It is the Lord that commandeth the waters; it is the glorious God that maketh the thunder. It is the Lord that ruleth the sea; the voice of the Lord is mighty in operation; the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedar trees; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Libanus. . . . The Lord sitteth above the water-flood, and the Lord remaineth a King forever."²

² Ps. lxxv., lxxiv., lxxviii., xxix. Prayer Book version.

So far I have only stated the fact that the belief of mankind has corresponded with the dicta of St. Paul in this passage.

But it may be asked, Is there no reason to be given for this fact? Is there no proof of the dogmas of the apostle? It is not enough to know that the pagan philosophers said so and so, or that the Jewish apocryphal writers gave a similar testimony, or that the Hebrew psalmists wrote sublime poetry founded on the same conceptions? Men in our time are asking a reason for every opinion and for every doctrine. What reason, then, is there for the assertion that the eternal power and divinity of the Creator are manifest to man in the physical phenomena of the universe?

I answer, that the universe, whether considered as a whole, or in its separate parts, gives unmistakable evidence of intelligence and design, of the adaptation of means to ends, of the correlation of forces, of a marvellous proportion in its structure, so that the more closely it is studied, and the more deeply its phenomena are pondered, the more clearly is it seen that the great forces, which are at work in nature, are not blind or purposeless, working without design and without control, but forces which are evidently in the service of an Intelligence, and directed by a Will, and that they are co-operating for ends as beneficent as they are great; and,

therefore, by necessary deduction of the reason, in accordance with that great fundamental axiom, that "every effect must have an adequate cause," we do certainly infer that there is behind the phenomena of the universe, "eternal power and divinity."

This, you perceive, is no more or less than the argument from design, — technically, the teleological argument. It is as old as Socrates — yes, as old as the reasoning of the human mind upon this subject. It is indeed an argument which it is quite the fashion to belittle in our day. But it is none the less unanswerable. The reasoning of the great Athenian sage against Aristodemus, whom Plato describes as "a little man well known in Athens as one who laughed and jeered" at those who practised the duties of religion, is valid to-day, nor has it lost an iota of its force against atheism, whether it be that of the materialist or the pantheist. The organization of the human body, the uses of the eye, the ear, the mouth, the tongue, the nose, furnished Socrates with instances of adaptation of means to ends on which he constructed his arguments. Has this branch of the argument from design lost any of its force? In the light of physiology and comparative anatomy, we confidently affirm that it is vastly stronger in our day than in the time of Socrates. The same

is true of that part of the great Athenian's argument which more directly bears upon the subject before us. "Then," continued Socrates, "consider yourself: do you believe that there is something in you which we call intelligence? And if in you, whence came it? Is there no intelligence in the world outside of you? . . . Is your mind the only part of you which is underived from any source? And is it possible, or any way conceivable, that all this gigantic and beautifully ordered frame of things which we call the world, should have jumped into its present consistency from mere random forces, without calculation?" Again I demand, Is this argument less weighty in the nineteenth century after Christ, than in the fifth century before Christ? Is there less evidence of design and of order in "the gigantic frame of things which we call the world," since Newton and Kepler, and a host of other astronomers, have uncovered the starry realms to our astonished eyes, and expounded to mankind the architecture of the heavens?

Is there less evidence of design in the earth itself, since Hugh Miller has interpreted "The Testimony of the Rocks;" since Lyell and other no less distinguished investigators have pushed forward the marvellous inductions of geology, till the rock-ribbed Earth has been forced to tell the

secrets of her growth ; and men have traced back through untold ages the strange and varied processes by which this planet was prepared to become the dwelling-place of man ? Can we study the intricate processes of the great laboratory of nature through the seven geological ages without being filled with an awe of the presence of the Infinite Intelligence and the Eternal Power which has ordered and arranged all this, and so directed these gigantic forces in their mutual play that there has come at last out of all a kosmos, and not a chaos ? Can we go into the laboratory of the chemist, or look through the botanist's microscope, and discover how the most perfect mathematical proportion runs through both the mineral and the vegetable kingdoms, without similar reflections — without perceiving in every formula of chemical combination, in every proportion of vegetable tissue, the operation of intelligence working to an end ?

Why, so far from the argument from design, on behalf of St. Paul's proposition in our text, having lost its force or gone out of date, it has been vastly strengthened — yea, it has gathered a cumulative force in the lapse of ages, until, in the light of modern science, it ought to be, to every well-ordered and well-balanced mind, absolutely overwhelming. For no age of the world ought those

words of the poet Spenser to have a deeper meaning than for ours : —

“What time this world’s great workmaister did cast
To make all things such as we now behold,
It seems that He before His eyes had plast
A goodly patterne, to whose perfect mould
He fashioned them as comely as He could,
That now so fair and seemly they appear;
As naught may be amended anywhere.”

Vain, then, is it to quote Comte and Darwin as authority for rejecting the argument from design. In vain will even the greater names of Bacon and Goethe be, by a misunderstanding of their real sentiments, alleged against the legitimate use of the teleological argument. In vain will review-writers “make little account of marks of INTELLIGENCE,” and rank all evidences of design “as happy coincidences.”

Such purblind babblings may find a fitting rebuke from the lips of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor-philosopher, who said, “If the gods do not exist, or if they have no concern about human affairs, what is it to me to live in a universe devoid of gods, or devoid of Providence? But in truth, they do exist, and have a care for human things.” And again : “The universe is either a confusion, and a mutual involution of things, and

a dispersion ; or it is unity and order and providence." But let us summon a modern witness, himself a scientist and a writer of note on scientific subjects, and let him rebuke this mole-eyed philosophy which can see no design in the phenomena of nature. "This universe," says Professor Stirling in his work on protoplasm, "is not an accidental cavity in which an accidental dust has been accidentally swept into heaps for the accidental evolution of the majestic spectacle of organic and inorganic life. That majestic spectacle is a spectacle as plainly for the eye of reason as any diagram of the mathematician. That majestic spectacle could have been constructed, *was* constructed, only in reason, for reason, and by reason ; and therefore, everywhere, from the smallest particle to the largest system, moulded and modelled and inhabited BY DESIGN."

Let it be distinctly understood, moreover, that the man who accepts the doctrine of St. Paul in our text, and for proof rests upon the evidences of design in nature, is not necessarily at war with modern science. He may be an evolutionist ; that is, he may stand with the moderate wing of that school, as many able and devout theologians do to-day, and yet hold with consistency the positions advocated in this discourse. Hear Professor Stanley Jevons upon this point : "I cannot for a mo-

ment admit that the theory of evolution will alter our theological ideas. . . . I do not, any less than Paley, believe that the eye of man manifests design. I believe that the eye was gradually developed, but the ultimate result must have been contained in the aggregate of causes ; and these, so far as we can see, were subject to the arbitrary choice of the Creator.” Or, take the words of the late Charles Kingsley : “What harm can come to religion, even if it be demonstrated, not only that God is so wise that He can make all things, but that He is so much wiser than even that, that He can make all things make themselves ?” In short, the truth of the *dictum* of St. Paul here does not depend on the mode in which we may conceive the Creator to have acted, but on the deeper question whether we believe in a living and true God, Maker of heaven and earth. Is it your conception that all things are under the dominion of grand and universal laws ? Then I challenge your acceptance of the statement of my text that Eternal Power and Divinity are manifested by the physical universe ; because those laws imply a lawgiver, and they are so ordered in their self-executing capacity that they speak eloquently of the eternal power that framed them. In this spirit Tennyson sings, —

“God is law, say the wise ; O Soul, and, let us rejoice,
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit
may meet —

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and
feet."

On the other hand, do you accept evolution as the mode of the genesis of the world? Still, I challenge your acceptance of the apostle's proposition, because, as Kingsley says, "If there has been an evolution, there must have been an evolver;" and in the long process of evolution, moving ever along an ascending path toward a fixed goal or ideal form, there is surely a stupendous exhibition of "the Eternal Power and Divinity" of the great God who hath created all things.

Are we, then, it may be asked, able to understand the design of every thing in the entire circle of physical phenomena? By no means. On the contrary, we are only beginning to spell out the mystic legend. The universe is a vast and complicated system; and oftentimes it seems to the investigator so complicated, that the brain grows dizzy in the effort to discover its harmony. And hence we hear some in our day crying that the world is "a pure chaos of phenomena and forms." While others, baffled by the problems which confront them, confounded by the terrible evils, the pain, the misery, the destructive forces of nature, abandon all faith in God, and cry out that "the

tragic is the law of the world ;” that, instead of benevolence, they discover a dark Machiavelianism in nature ; in short, if there is any divinity there, it is a malevolent one !

These utterances of despair are not altogether surprising. They point to the failure of mere reason to interpret the world and life. They indicate also the weakness of natural religion, which cannot satisfy man’s moral and spiritual needs. The God of nature is, as St. Paul here puts it, “*eternal power and divinity* ;” — but poor humanity needs something more than this : it is oppressed by care and sorrow ; it is weary with the sweat and toil of life’s journey ; above all, it is burdened by sin ; and it can find no answer in the phenomena of nature to its cry for relief. But there is a voice which answers. Sweetly it breaks upon the ears of a weary world, “Come unto Me, all ye that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” Ah ! whose voice is that ? This same Paul answers, It is the voice of One who is the image of the Invisible God, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Is God manifest in the human soul ? But He is more gloriously manifest in His Son, who was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Are His invisible attributes — His eternal power and divinity — clearly seen in the material universe ? In Jesus Christ, who is the express

image of His person, there is manifest much more than this, — not only eternal power, but infinite love, divine pity and compassion — yea, the fulness of the Godhead bodily. In Him we have the answer and the antidote to the philosophy of despair. For His name is Jesus, — Saviour, — and His mission is to redeem and save a ruined world, to comfort and pardon sinning men, and at last to regenerate the world, which now presents so mixed a spectacle of evil and good. We, then, as disciples of this God-sent Saviour, are not amazed or confounded by the miseries and woes of humanity, or by the dark features of the economy of nature; for we know that the earth and its inhabitants are in a state of ruin, and that the Day of Redemption is drawing nigh, when the creation itself “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”

Meanwhile we discover in the things that are created an ever-increasing manifestation of eternal power and divinity, while, as the “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” we realize a certain “proprietaryship” in the magnificent domain of Nature, since we

“Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye
And smiling say, My Father made them all.”

V.

THE SILENCE OF GOD.

“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence.” — PSALMS l. 3.

THIS psalm is also a prophecy, — a prophecy of the day of judgment. It pictures the advent of the Judge of all the earth. He summons mankind to His footstool : “The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.” To enhance the solemnity of the summons, the Psalmist gives the three Hebrew names of the Deity, — El, Elohim, Jehovah ; the name of power, the name of manifold manifestation, the covenant name ; “God in His might, God in the manifold attributes and manifestations of His being,” God in His revealed covenant relations to His people. This is the God who now summons the world to judgment from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Yes, although now men see no sign, hear no warning of His approach ; although they even scoff and mock at the prophecy of His coming, — “our God shall come, and shall not keep silence : a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very

tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is judge Himself."

Now it is not my purpose to discuss the last judgment, when God's voice shall be heard in such terrible majesty, but rather to consider the marvellous, and, as some may think, mysterious, silence of God during the present economy, anterior to the judgment of the great day.

I call your attention to the language of the Psalmist here. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence," — shall no longer keep silence as He now does. We are confronted by the fact that God does not now reveal Himself to the eye or to the ear of sense. We have the record of such revelations in the past; we have the prophecy of at least one such in the future; but none of us has ever heard His voice, or seen His shape. Even the revelations of the olden time were exceptional and to a few chosen ones, not to the multitude; and hence it stands as the rule of the divine dealings, that God keeps silence.

Rise in the morning, and go forth to look upon the world as the light reveals it to the eye. You see the sun mounting to his throne of glory, dis-

persing, as he goes, life and warmth and beauty over all the habitable globe. All nature awakes at his approach ; field and forest are resonant with the music of singing birds ; every shrub and bush and tree is pulsating with life ; every leaf is astir ; every blade of grass, every stalk of grain, moves in the morning breeze ; overhead the clouds are floating in the blue ether, like ships sailing to their haven over the sea. But though there is a very orchestra of subtile sounds, — the song of birds, the hum of insect life, the sough of the swaying pines, the rustle of the dewy leaves, — yet nowhere in field or forest, on the green earth or in the deep blue sky, do you hear the voice of the Deity. God keeps silence !

Go climb some lofty mountain, until you have the clouds beneath your feet, and the world spread out in grand panorama before you, river and plain, hill and valley, city and hamlet. You look out through a translucent atmosphere upon almost illimitable space, and you see grouped before you, at a single glance, the varying conditions of human life, — sunshine and peace in one valley, storm and darkness in another, a gentle shower, spanned by the rainbow of hope, in a third. You seem to breathe the pure air of heaven, and to stand under its cloudless dome. But neither in that blue arch above you, nor among those vast

ranges of billowy mountains which encompass you, nor from those yet loftier snow-clad peaks which tower up to heaven, arrayed in their white robes forever as the high-priests of nature, do you hear any whisper or echo of the voice of the invisible God. The cataract thunders in the gorge, the mountain-brook babbles in the valley, the sad sea-waves chant their dirge along the shore, the hoarse thunder reverberates from peak to peak, but God keeps silence !

Or, again, join the astronomer in his lofty watch-tower, and gaze long and earnestly into the spangled canopy above you ; then on the swift wings of the telescope take your flight into the vast reaches of illimitable space ; speed your way from star to star, from system to system, until you realize what a tiny waif upon the boundless ocean of being is this little world of ours. Listen while the man of science tells you of a sun in the constellation Lyra, in comparison to which the great sun of our system "pales its ineffectual fires," and then ask him if ever in all his journeys through boundless space he has heard the voice of God ; if ever from those infinite depths there has been wafted to him any articulate sound from the lips of the great Creator. He will tell you nay. "In solemn silence" those shining orbs move through the fields of space : no voice nor sound

is heard among them. Meteors flash across the sky in momentary brilliance ; comets spread their shining veils over the face of night ; new stars shine out in the heavens ; new nebulæ are from time to time uncovered to view, — but no voice breaks the stillness which reigns among the multitudinous worlds on high. God keeps silence !

This may seem strange, but there are circumstances under which the silence of God is stranger yet. Picture some of the scenes of shameful revelry nightly enacted in such a city as this, when the license and the impiety, if not the splendor, of Belshazzar's feast are reproduced ; when lips that were taught in infancy to lisp the name of God in prayer are made the instruments of ribaldry and blasphemy ; when the lessons of piety and purity learned at a mother's knee are ruthlessly trampled under foot ; when the brow that was signed with the sign of the cross forgets to blush when the Crucified is put to an open shame by those for whom He died. Yet no handwriting on the wall rebukes the shameless revellers. No "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," startles and terrifies the guilty company. God keeps silence !

Or, think of the deeds of wickedness daily wrought among men, — "man's inhumanity to man," the heartless cruelty with which the strong prey upon the weak, "the oppressor's wrongs, the

proud man's contumely," deceit and falsehood, trickery and hypocrisy, wrong and robbery. How many are there who answer to the portraiture which the Psalmist gives of the cunning plotters of his day? — "He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor . . . when he draweth him into his net." Yet the thunderbolts of the Divine wrath do not smite them, nor does the earth open to swallow them up, nor does a voice from heaven rebuke their wickedness. God keeps silence!

Now the question arises, and presses for solution, Why does God keep silence? Why does He not speak so plainly in the ears of men, that none could fail to hear, that not even the fool could say in his heart, "There is no God"? Why does He not emblazon His name across the heavens, so that every child of man should see it? Why does not His voice so fill the world that men should hear it every day, and recognize it as the voice of God?

Several reasons may be given. In the first place, "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit." A spiritual being cannot be apprehended by the senses. The eye of flesh, the ear of flesh, cannot perceive the invisible God. It is the soul which perceives Him, which hears Him, which apprehends Him. It is

but a vague and dim conception of God that can be obtained by any external manifestation. The thunderings and lightnings and voices of Sinai impressed the rude multitude of Israel with the awfulness of the Divine Majesty; but it was so far from teaching them to truly apprehend Him as the invisible Jehovah, that they speedily fell to worshipping the golden calf. Now, though there is no audible voice of God, none that appeals to the ear of sense, the universe is full of harmonies that appeal to the soul, and sing of His wisdom and His power, His goodness and His grace. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handywork." Yet even so, it may be said, these voices are inarticulate: we must say of them as the Psalmist says in the same composition, "There is neither speech nor language." Their declaration is not so distinct, their demonstration of the attributes of God is not so clear, as to preclude the possibility of doubt. No; because faith in God must remain a moral act; it must be the result of moral considerations, not of the formulas of logic. The stream cannot rise above its source; and belief in God, which should be the result of a logical demonstration, would remain an act of the logical faculties, and would have no moral value. Moreover, if the being and attributes of God were so plainly exhibited in the vis-

ible universe as to preclude the possibility of a doubt, a necessary element of man's probation would be wanting.

This introduces another reason for the silence of God ; viz., the probationary character of human life. Now, probation means that man is on trial to see what is in his heart, whether he will choose the right or the wrong, the good or the evil ; and freedom of choice is an essential element of this probation. But if God's presence and power and retributive justice were forced upon the attention of men, so that they could not escape the consciousness of it ; if God's voice were ever sounding in their ears in warning ; and if punishment followed swiftly upon transgression (as is sometimes the case when natural law is violated), — men in that case would act as truly under compulsion as if bound hand and foot, and driven by the whip of the taskmaster. There might be obedience to the divine law ; but it would be enforced obedience, and hence its moral value would be gone. In that case, life would cease to be a school of character : its disciplinary and educational function would disappear. It would become a galley for slaves, a prison-house for convicts, or, at best, a machine-shop for drudges. Virtue would wither and die under the blighting influence of compulsion, as a flower exposed to a killing frost. Men would learn to avoid vice as

children learn to avoid putting their hands into the fire, because punishment would follow immediately upon the act; but there would be no more moral value attaching to the one act of avoidance than to the other. Such an economy of government might produce the semblance of virtue and godliness, never the reality. The flowers in that garden would be artificial, made of paper or of china, not the sweet and fragrant flowers which God and man now behold blossoming in this desert of sin upon the stem of tempted humanity. Freedom alone, my brethren, forms the true basis of character. In childhood, indeed, there must be restraint, swift discipline, espionage; but these bands must little by little be loosed, and freedom gradually and increasingly granted as the mind unfolds and the character develops.

God forbid that I should encourage the fashionable American custom of permitting children to rule their parents, and to grow up without learning obedience and reverence; but, all the more I protest against the system of protracting the period of tutelage beyond its proper limit: youth must learn self-mastery, but they can never learn this without freedom. Constant espionage in the school and the college begets distrust and suspicion, and all manner of deceit and hypocrisy. The hand of authority must not always be kept in view, nor

must the voice of control be ever in their ears, if they are to learn true manliness and self-command. Let it be your aim to make your boy repel evil because it is evil, and not because he fears your frown or your rod. That is the discipline for the young child, not the self-respecting youth.

Now, it is precisely on this principle that we are to explain the silence of God, of which I have spoken. God seeks worshippers who will do right because it is right, and not because they fear the retribution which follows. Hence He, as it were, hides the rod: He does not execute sentence against an evil work speedily. "God is a righteous judge, strong and patient," — patient because He is strong, strong because He is patient. If His voice of power and majesty were ever reverberating through the world in tones which would compel the attention of men, if His arm were daily made bare for vengeance in the sight of all mankind, who does not see what would be the result? The piety which would grow up under such an economy would be like the repentance and humility of the king of Egypt, which lasted only so long as the thunder of the Divine displeasure was heard in the land.

If you ask, then, O my brother! why God does not speak more plainly, why He does not compel our belief in His being and power and providence

by voices that could not but be heard, why He does not make His judgments so manifest that all men would be constrained to recognize the bond between sin and His displeasure as indissoluble?—I answer, it is because He wants your love, not your dread; because He wants you to serve Him freely, and not by constraint; because He wants to win your heart, not to compel your outward conformity to His will.

It is a bride that Christ seeks, not a captive; and a bride who will give herself to Him freely, not by any manner of constraint. Hence He woos the hearts of men gently, by soft persuasion, by still small voices, rather than by the earthquake, and the storm, and the fire. Yes: for though to the sensuous and selfish man, imbruted by sin and unhallowed passion, God seems to keep unbroken silence, and though the ear of sense cannot hear His voice anywhere, yet to the man whose spirit aspires to the true and the noble and the good, His voice is heard everywhere. “Day unto day uttereth speech; night unto night sheweth knowledge.” “Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words to the end of the world.” “The sun by day, and the moon and the stars by night” sing of His power, His wisdom, and His goodness. To such a man, the universe is a whispering-gallery of God. The Psalmist heard the heavens

declare His glory, and the firmament His handiwork : he heard the divine voice everywhere : —

“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters : . . .

“The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars ; . . .

“The voice of the Lord cleaveth the flames of fire.

“The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness.

“The voice of the Lord strippeth the forests bare : and in His temple [this visible world] every thing saith glory.”¹

Psalmist and prophet heard His voice in all the powers of physical nature : —

“The voice of Thy thunder was in the whirlwind.”

“When He uttereth His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens.”

“He thundereth with the voice of His excellency. God thundereth marvellously with His voice.”

But, O my brothers ! God has spoken from time to time, in the history of the world, by a voice more clear and more articulate than the voice of nature. He has broken His general rule of silence, — as at Sinai ; as to Isaiah in vision ; as to Daniel and other prophets. And as “by divers portions and in divers manners” He spake unto the fathers by the prophets, so hath He in these last days “spoken unto us by His Son.”

¹ Ps. xxix. Revised version.

Hearken, I pray you, to His voice ; turn not away from Him that speaketh from heaven. Open the Gospels ; read the story of that matchless life of Jesus of Nazareth ; follow His footsteps from Galilee to Jerusalem ; sit at His feet, and listen to His words, and if you are a man that loves the true and the pure and the good, that voice of Jesus will have power and magnetism for you. It will draw you after Him. It will win you with a strange fascination, until at length you will confess, "Never man spake as this man." Yea, you will feel, by and by, that this voice of unequalled majesty must be the voice of God. All that is true and lovely and pure and elevating must be born of God. This man is from God. He is the way and the truth and the life, and He claims to be the Son of God. Must not this claim be true ? If still any doubt linger, follow Him farther still, even to Pilate's judgment-seat, and to the hill of Calvary. Hear the voice that proceeds from that strange but wondrous Cross. Mark how He suffers. See the majesty and the glory of His death ; and, pondering all, you will be constrained to exclaim with the centurion, "Truly, this was the Son of God !"

VI.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." —
HOSEA vi. 3.

THE knowledge of God spoken of here by the prophet is something distinct and definite. It is as palpable as the morning light. It is as sensible as the rain that waters the earth. He who knows God in the sense here intended, is as certain of it as he is that the sun has risen upon the world; and he feels the blessedness of this knowledge as distinctly as the thirsty soil feels the life-giving influence of the rain which cometh down from heaven. Now, is such a knowledge of God as this possible? Does it exist except in the visions of the prophet or the poet or the mystic? Nay, there is a previous question, — Is any knowledge of God possible?

The agnostic answers, sometimes with a sneer, but quite as often with a sigh, "No, we cannot know God. If He exists, He is beyond our reach :

He is unknowable." He echoes, in a different sense, Job's question: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" And he answers boldly, though it may be sadly, "No, we cannot find out God. The telescope does not find Him. The microscope does not find Him. The crucible does not find Him. The scalpel does not find Him." In other words, the agnostic confesses that he is blind and deaf in relation to God. He does not deny that there *is* a God: he only denies that he can be *known*. In that vast periphery of nescience which surrounds the domains of physical science, and which only grows vaster as science extends her conquests, God may exist, but, if so, He is to us unknowable. This is the mournful creed which underlies much, not only of the science, but of the poetry and the fiction, of our time, and which hangs a dark pall over the life of thousands in all classes of society.

Now, what are we to say to all this? I answer, that, in an important sense, the agnostic is right. What he says agrees in one aspect with what our Lord and His apostles have taught us. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The agnostic is not born again; he has never known the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost; therefore he cannot see the kingdom of

God. Remember also what St. Paul taught : "No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost," — and again, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." That is to say, man is by nature so far fallen, so far degenerate, that, without the transforming and renewing power of the Holy Spirit, he cannot understand and appropriate the things of God — the truths of the spiritual world.

Is man, then, born into this world with no capacity for knowing God? Has he no spiritual eye? no organs whereby he is placed *en rapport* with the spiritual world? By no means. He is not so depraved that no trace of his divine origin remains. The image of God is not totally defaced. The spiritual faculties are not completely destroyed. They are so far disabled and dwarfed that nothing but the regenerating energy of the Spirit of God can restore them to their normal state, and give them back their lost supremacy. But they are there, and in many ways they respond to the voice of God. In childhood the correlation of human nature with the spiritual world is easily established. No man is born an atheist or an agnostic. The organs of spiritual life may be only rudimentary, but they exist. It is because they are not exer-

cised, that they suffer atrophy, and by degrees shrink and shrivel away till they are almost obliterated. Let me here avail myself of the recent language of a scientific writer: "Degeneration in the spiritual sphere involves primarily the impairing of the faculties of salvation, and ultimately the loss of them. It really means that the very soul itself becomes piecemeal destroyed, until the very capacity for God and righteousness is gone. The soul, in its highest sense, is a vast capacity for God. It is like a curious chamber added on to being, and somehow involving being, — a chamber with elastic and contractile walls, which can be expanded, with God as its guest, illimitably, but which without God shrinks and shrivels until every vestige of the divine is gone, and God's image is left without God's spirit. One cannot call what is left a soul: it is a shrunken, useless organ, a capacity sentenced to death by disuse, which droops as a withered hand by the side, and cumbers Nature like a rotted branch. Nature has her revenge upon neglect as well as upon extravagance. Disuse, with her, is as mortal a sin as abuse.

"There are certain burrowing animals — the mole, for instance — which have taken to spending their lives beneath the surface of the ground. And Nature has taken her revenge upon them in a thoroughly natural way: she has closed their

eyes. . . . There are fishes also which have had to pay the same terrible forfeit for having made their abode in dark caverns where eyes can never be required. And in exactly the same way the spiritual eye must die and lose its power by purely natural law, if the soul choose to walk in darkness rather than in light.”¹ What an impressive lesson upon the danger of neglecting the light and the opportunity which God gives us of knowing Him and beholding His glory! With what terrible emphasis does Nature herself teach us that if we bury our talent in a napkin, — the faculty for knowing God, — it shall be taken from us! Well says the prophet in our text, “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” There lives not an unbeliever or an agnostic who would not to-day be rejoicing in the knowledge of God, if he had “followed on to know the Lord,” — if he had listened to God’s voice while he yet could hear it. Solemn is the exhortation of the Master, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Yes; for if he will not, the time will come when he cannot, — because the power of hearing will be gone.

It *is* possible, then, to know God, but only by the renewing and enlightening grace of His Holy Spirit. For though man was made to know God, and was endowed with spiritual capacities, yet he

¹ Drummond: *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, pp. 110, 111.

cannot go beyond a dim and vague apprehension of God : he cannot adequately and sufficiently know Him, without a quickening of his nature by the life-giving spirit. The God-consciousness in him will remain a rudimentary organ, an undeveloped capacity, until he shall be born from above. Moreover, this knowledge of God is not reached by an intellectual process : it cannot be arrived at only through the reason. It is faith which apprehends the invisible God, yet it is also experience which affixes the seal to the knowledge which faith attains. When Naaman had been cleansed from his leprosy by washing seven times in Jordan, in obedience to the word of the prophet, he had the proof of experience that Elisha's God was the true God. "Now," said he, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."

So, also, the man whom Jesus cured of his blindness had this one and all-sufficient answer to the sophistries of the Jews and their accusations against Jesus,— "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." That one ineffaceable fact summed up for him the evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus. Precisely in the same way the all-sufficient evidence of Christianity to the Christian lies in the equally indelible fact that whereas he was blind, now he sees. Christ is the Saviour because He saves. I know He is the Saviour, be-

cause I have experienced in my own soul His power to save. And I am not more certain of this after twenty years' study of the evidences of Christianity, than when in my boyhood I first felt His saving grace in my soul.

This knowledge of God, therefore, is not a privilege of the man of culture or the man of intellectual power, but is equally open to the unlettered, to the simple, and to children. It is the heart which is concerned here. "The pure in heart shall see God."

Let not the man of science smile in lofty superiority at such claims. Let him not treat with contempt this knowledge of God, because it is unknown to him, or because it is unverifiable by any of his scientific methods. The mental and moral world is unknown to the plant: is it, therefore, not real? The grand generalizations of science are totally unknown and unknowable to the highest animal intelligences below man: are *they*, therefore, not real? No: the scientist may say to the Christian, "All this is an unknown region to me; I cannot enter or apprehend it." But, mark you, it is unscientific to say, "Because I cannot verify it by my methods, it must be a delusion."

But, it may be asked, if one man can know God, why may not another? Why should one man claim a faculty not possessed by another? We

might answer, "In your own sphere, O man of science! all men are not equal. One has the philosophic faculty, another has not. One has the scientific spirit, another has not. One can move with ease through the mazes of the higher mathematics, another can scarcely go beyond the rule of three." But there is a broader and a better answer. There is a gulf between the natural and the spiritual man, wider than that between animal life and plant life. "To be carnally-minded is death." "To be spiritually-minded is life." "He that hath the Son of God hath life: he that hath not the Son hath not life." The distinction, therefore, is as broad as between the living and the dead. The Christian — if he is a *true* Christian — has been quickened — made alive — by the Spirit of God. He has received "a new and distinct and supernatural endowment." Hence the words of the prophet find in him their fulfilment. The knowledge of God is to him like the morning breaking over the world after the darkness of night, or like the rain which descends from heaven in blessing upon the earth. "His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

Another point which it deeply concerns us to observe, is this: This new life of regeneration is

a beginning, a bud of promise, a day-dawn : it is not the consummation of spiritual life, or the fruitage of character, or the high noon of communion with God. Doubtless every regenerate man has come to "know God ;" but it is an inchoate knowledge at best, — often very like the blind man's experience, who when his eyes were anointed with the clay, and he was bidden to look up, said, "I see men as trees walking." Saith the prophet, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Saith the apostle, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. . . . This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize," — and what was the prize? He himself answers, "That I may know Him!" The work and the duty of the Christian, then, is, to "follow on" to know the Lord, obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit, ever pressing on to greater fulness and clearness of knowledge, that he may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that he may be filled with all the fulness of God. It is indeed true, that even at the loftiest point of human attainment, it must be confessed with Job, "God is great, and we know

Him not ;” but it is possible to make great progress in this heavenly science.

On the other hand lies the danger, which ever dogs the heels of languid pursuit of the knowledge of God, — I mean that we become examples in the spiritual world of “arrested development.” God meant us to rise to a higher type of being and life and character. We, by neglect, or indifference, or idleness, may suffer deterioration, may degenerate to a lower type, in which we shall lose altogether our hold upon God, and our capacity for knowing Him. How many professing Christians seem to be instances of arrested spiritual development ! They have no firm grasp of divine things. They have no joyous confidence in God. They cannot give a clear testimony such as that of St. Paul, “I know in whom I have believed.” Their convictions of truth are feeble. Their hope sheds no clear light upon their path. Altogether they are unstable and unsettled, the prey of doubts, or, what is worse, the victims of carnal security. If trouble overtakes them, they are driven at the mercy of the storm, seeming to have no anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil, because they can no longer say with afflicted Job, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

My brethren, of what unspeakable importance is it to us that our Christian life should not pre-

sent this mournful example of decay, of fruitlessness, of death. How deeply it concerns us to have a faith so firmly anchored that no storm can shake it, lest in the needful time of trouble, in the dark night of adversity, in the terrible strain of temptation, we make shipwreck of hope! Ah, we want a faith that plants itself firmly, and meets all calamities with the afflicted patriarch's clear conviction, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." We want a religion that rises out of the morass of uncertainty, and stands with the apostle on the rock of a clear consciousness of God;—"I know in whom I have believed." No other faith, no other religion, can meet the necessities of men placed in a world of temptation and trouble, and treading a path which for all alike leads down to the valley and shadow of death, and thence on to the great white throne of judgment.

How can such a faith, such a religion, be attained? First, by realizing to its depth our emptiness and need, and then our utter inability to supply it. Before we can join in these great words of the patriarch and of the apostle, we must learn to say with Jeremiah, "I know that the way of man is not in himself," and with Paul, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." The deep and ever repeated conviction of our innate weakness and sinfulness will prepare

the way for the entrance of the divine grace and strength. If we bring with us into our closets, when we kneel before God every day, this profound sense of our need, we shall the more fervently call upon God to fill our empty vessel out of the full river of His grace. But if we cling to the fond delusion of our self-sufficiency, we shall never know any thing of the all-sufficient grace of the living God.

The next thing to do, in order to attain certainty and assurance in religion, is to clear away certain obstacles which commonly clog up and check the flow of the grace of God. Of these, the first and most obvious is sin. "Blessed are the pure in heart," says Jesus, "for they shall see God." The impure simply cannot see Him or know Him. We Christians must break utterly and forever with sin. There must be no compromise. The guilty habit must die. The accursed thing must be abandoned. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar." So speaks the disciple whom Jesus loved: so must speak every teacher of Christianity who is true to his office. Let us remember it is an eternal law of God that sin blinds the spiritual eye, and dulls the spiritual ear, so that we *cannot* see God, or hear His voice. There is a retribution which antedates the Day of Judgment. It follows

sin like a shadow. The consequences of our evil deeds do not *all* wait till the final account is rendered. They follow here and now.

“Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are.”

“It makes us sin with a lighter hand to run an account with retribution, as it were, and delay the reckoning-time with God. But every day is a reckoning-day. Every soul is a book of judgment; and Nature, as a recording angel, marks there every sin. If all will be judged by the great Judge some day, all are judged by Nature now. The sin of yesterday, as part of its penalty, has the sin of to-day. All follow us in silent retribution on our past, and go with us to the grave.”

But there are other obstacles to a clear vision of God besides actual and definite sin. I mention two of them. Worldliness, — the excessive love of this present world; the giving to something other than God the heart's best affections and the being's best energies. This weaves a film over the spiritual eye, which, like a cataract in the natural organ, slowly but surely shuts up the window, and the soul is left in darkness. The prophet indicates, as the condition of a larger knowledge of God, that men should follow on to know Him; that they should make this the object of aspira-

tion, of ambition, of endeavor. But how many of us Christians are "following on" after other things rather than this; pursuing, oh, so eagerly, the objects which pleasure or ambition or gain hold out to us; so absorbed in these earthly aims, that we have neither time nor strength nor interest for this heavenly science! Brethren, let us not deceive ourselves. The knowledge of God is a prize which cannot be won without earnest effort; and unless we are willing to seek it as the first thing and the best thing, we shall never attain it. We have but one heart; and if we give it to the world, we have nothing left for God.

To worldliness we must add neglect of prayer. Here we come to the source and fount of almost all the other evils which hinder our attainment of certainty and assurance in religion. Probably there are few of us who do not "say our prayers," but how many of us pray humbly, earnestly, perseveringly? How many of us approach the throne of grace as if we were really entering into the Divine Presence, — with reverence, with holy awe, with childlike trust? How many of us pray with expectation, looking and waiting for a blessing, fervently pleading His gracious promises, even wrestling, as Jacob did, with unconquerable faith?

Prayer is the key which will unlock the treasures of divine knowledge; but it is such prayer as con-

centrates the energies and the aspirations of the soul, — not the feeble, languid, lifeless thing which for many of us goes by that holy name. God forbid that I should discourage any disciple of Christ who is battling with coldness and distraction in prayer, who mourns over his lack of fervor in supplication, and whose heart does cry out, “Lord, teach me how to pray.” To such I would rather whisper encouragement, pointing them to the assurance that He whom we serve is a gracious Master, who “will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.”

But if there is any man here who says his prayers in a lifeless, formal, indifferent way, without any effort to rise out of the form into the reality, to him I say, such prayer will never bring you nearer to God. The Lord is the rewarder of them that *diligently* seek Him. Go, then, and learn what that meaneth, “*Then* shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.”

VII.

“REST FOR THE WEARY.”

“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” — ST. MATTHEW xi. 28.

THESE familiar words bring us face to face with the great alternative concerning Jesus of Nazareth, — either He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Saviour of the world, who is entitled to our deepest devotion and our highest adoration; or else He is, at best, a self-deluded enthusiast, whom we cannot even venerate as a wise counsellor, or follow as a safe guide. Think for a moment of the stupendous claim which He here puts forth. Who of woman born — king or conqueror, sage or seer, patriot or reformer — ever claimed power to give rest to a weary soul? Liberty, they have promised, deliverance from oppression, social enfranchisement, intellectual emancipation and the like, but never “rest.”

Yet here is One who undertakes to give rest to every troubled heart in all the world, in all ages of the world, among all sorts and conditions of men! Now, if it be true (as surely it is) that “only the

infinite pity is equal to the infinite pathos of human life," then it follows that such a claim as this would be more than arrogant, — it would be presumptuous, it would be profane, — were He that uttered it any less than the Eternal Messiah, the Divine Redeemer of the world. I am not aware that any unbeliever has ever made these words the basis of an assault on the dignity of Jesus; yet who does not see that if He were not the Christ of God, such an utterance would deserve the contempt of mankind? But in fact, hardly any words of Jesus have so kindled the veneration and the devotion of men as these, which, if uttered by any other great teacher, would have excited ridicule by the extravagance of the claim they involve.

Why is this? How comes it to pass that words which on the lips of a Solon, a Socrates, a Plato, would have been condemned as intolerable self-assertion, to be accounted for only as the result of a temporary madness, on His lips are entirely natural, in keeping with the rest of His teaching, and in harmony with the impression which His person produces upon the mind? How is it that He alone of men is able to make such a claim without loss of dignity — nay, that He thereby enhances the majesty and the glory of His person? There can be but one answer. The royal purple becomes His shoulders, the jewelled diadem be-

comes His brow, because He is a king! He is able to make this transcendent offer of rest, because He can say, “All souls are mine.” He is able to sustain such a relation to all troubled hearts, in all time, as makes it possible for Him to give them rest, because He is “The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Do you question it? Ah! it might have been easy to mock at such a claim then, when He first uttered it, when its truth was, as it were, to be tested by time. But now it comes to us illustrated and confirmed by nearly nineteen centuries of Christian history. Yes, the promise has been fulfilled. If He made it with regal dignity, He has redeemed it with a majesty which is divine. What a spectacle is presented to the eye! I see a thorn-crowned sufferer, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, standing on the shore of Palestine, with out-stretched arms, and crying in a voice of infinite pity, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And lo! from all quarters of this weary earth, the sons and daughters of sorrow, an innumerable host, turn their steps to Him, as doves fly to their windows, and He gives them rest. As I look, I see a halo round His head, and a kingly sceptre in His pierced hand, and a diadem of

beauty on His blood-stained brow ; and hark ! a voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son : hear Him.”

But another voice I hear, not from heaven, but from some doubting Thomas on earth, saying, “This is only a fancy picture, painted with a brush dipped in the colors of the imagination.” Then, let us come to unquestioned examples of the fulfilment of the promise of the text. Here is an aged man imprisoned in one of Nero’s dungeons ; he is alone, for all his friends have forsaken him ; he is in chains, and under sentence of execution ; but the light of an immortal hope is in his eye, and the impress of unutterable peace is upon his brow, as he takes his pen and writes, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.”

Go to that same city of Rome a century later ; enter the Colosseum ; see that vast circling host of Roman citizens, of all ranks and conditions, from the plebeian to the emperor himself ; hear the fierce cry from tens of thousands of throats, “*Christianos ad leones,*” — “*To the lions with the Christians ;*” — and now mark that little band of

the followers of the Nazarene in the centre of the arena, expecting every moment the roar and the rush of the hungry and ferocious beasts: there they are, men, women, and children, soon to be torn limb from limb, for no other crime than for confessing themselves Christians. They can escape so horrible a fate by simply abjuring their faith; but they will rather die than deny Him who has given them “rest,” and whose presence fills them, even in that awful moment, with triumphant constancy. — Or take an illustration from our own age. There, in a foul Burmese prison, lies an American citizen, Adoniram Judson, the pioneer missionary to that part of India. For eighteen months he is kept a prisoner, amid indescribable sufferings, but his faith and his courage never fail him: he rests in the Lord, literally pillowing his head upon the promises of Christ Jesus, for his heroic wife has sewed up in a pillow his translation of the Bible into Burmese, and passed it to him through the bars of his prison; and having this, the fruit of so much consecrated toil, the brave and patient man seems to have rest, even in his dungeon.

Time would fail to tell of Livingstone, alone in an African jungle, surrounded by wild beasts, resting in perfect peace as he thought of Christ’s “word of honor,” “Lo, I am with you alway;”

of Coleridge Patteson, meeting the fury of the Melanesian savage with a smile so Christ-like, that the arrow drops from the bent bow harmless to the ground ; of Chinese Gordon, surpassing the fabled feats of romance and chivalry, because of his inflexible faith in the power and presence of Christ. Suffice it to remind you, that these and ten thousand similar instances find their only explanation in the fact that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the promise of the text, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Let us, then, listen to this voice of Jesus to-day, borne to us over land and sea, across oceans and centuries, with the confidence that He who offers us rest is well able to give it to all who come unto Him.

1. Observe in the first place who are invited, — “Ye that labor and are heavy laden.” According to Edersheim, He was on a journey, and, seeing His followers weary with travel, He used that as an image of the weariness of the spirit ; just as He taught the woman of Samaria to thirst for the living water, through the circumstance of her coming to Jacob’s well to draw water for her household.

It would seem, then, that this invitation of Jesus

Christ was of narrow application ; addressing itself to a certain class, and not to all ; not to the young and vigorous, not to the joyous crowd, or the busy toilers, but to the sufferers, the mourners, the children of sorrow and disappointment and bereavement. And hence you may be ready to think, that however sweet a gospel this may be for the sick-room, or the house of mourning, or the hospital, or the abodes of poverty and want, it has no message or ministry for the firesides where peace and plenty smile, for the homes of health and wealth, for the marts of trade, the myriad busy scenes where men are toiling bravely and successfully for the rewards of industry.

Well, in one sense this is true. So long as you are in no wise weary or heavy laden, so long as life seems to you like a summer sea, so long as you are confident you can stand alone, and lean on your own wisdom, and trust in your own strength, you will care nothing for this “rest” which Jesus offers : you will be as if you had not been invited or expected to come to Him. But there are moments in the life of every one, even the busiest and the most successful, when a sense of emptiness makes itself felt, and the heart grows weary, and cries out for a rest which the world cannot give. Yes, even in the halls of pleasure, and amid scenes of gayety and dissipation, this is true. I

make bold to affirm, that there is not one of all the gay crowd that nightly pursues the phantom of happiness in the train of the world, that does not sometimes know what it is to “labor and be heavy laden.” “What!” you reply, “these joyous youths and maidens, do they ask for ‘rest,’ and not rather for excitement and change? These ambitious young men, do they not ask rather for the race, the wrestle, the battle of life? Can we not see the ‘joy of conflict’ in their eyes, as they pant for the signal to be given for the contest to begin?” Yes; this is what the world sees; this is the outer aspect of their lives. But if we could see these same gay pleasure-seekers, or votaries of ambition, in their solitary hours, when the music has ceased, and the noise of the revel is hushed; if we could read their thoughts in many a time of introspection, — we would hear again the voice of the disappointed royal pleasure-seeker of old, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” For souls made with the capacity for immortality, made in the image of God, cannot, after all, slake their thirst in the shallow and muddy streams of earthly enjoyment: the infinite, the divine alone can meet their deepest cravings. See how restless they are. See how they flit from one scene of pleasure to another, from one excitement to another, from one ambition to another, seeking satisfaction, seeking rest, but

finding it never! I may speak to some such to-day. If so, let me ask you to recognize in this very restlessness a proof that you are made for immortality. Or at least let me forewarn you that though now you are well content with the delights and the pursuits of the world, the time will surely come when “a mighty famine” will arise in that land of sensual pleasure, or at best of merely temporal enjoyment, and your soul will cry out for hunger. When that day comes, as come it will, remember that you heard this day the voice of Jesus saying, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

But I turn from those who are unconscious of their need, or only half conscious of it, — who, if they feel it at all, feel it only in rare moments, and then but feebly, — to those who at once recognize themselves as among the weary and heavy laden; to the Christian who is laden with care or anxiety, or struggling with some unconquered evil habit; to the sinner whose sin has become a burden too heavy to be borne, who, like the publican, stands “afar off,” smiting on his breast, and saying, “God be merciful to me.” And to such, I commend this gracious word of Jesus Christ.

2. Take good heed, then, to this invitation, — “COME.” Oh, the depth of the riches of God’s free grace and redeeming love which lies in this

one little word ! It mirrors, like a dewdrop, the whole heaven of the divine pity for us sinful men. It is as the tiny lens of a telescope, through which we scan the infinite fields of the divine loving-kindness, with their starry galaxies of exceeding great and precious promises. It is as a narrow strait through which we look out upon the boundless ocean of the Fatherhood of God in Christ. Now it is the voice of God calling His people into the place of safety, — “Come thou and all thy house into the ark,” — type of Christ and His Church. Now it is the voice of the compassionate Father to His rebellious and guilty children, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Now it is the voice of the messengers of grace, standing by the fountain of the water of life in the midst of this desert of sin, and crying, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Now it is the voice of the servants, inviting a famishing and weary world to the rich feast of mercy and peace spread for all in the gospel, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Now it is the voice of Jesus Himself, as when He stood and

cried on the last great day of the feast in Jerusalem, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Now it is the voice of the Spirit and the Bride, saying, "Come. . . . Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." And everywhere it expresses the tenderness and the yearning of a Father's heart, the sweet urgency of constraining love, gently pleading with the prodigal to return to his Father's house, and submit to his Father's authority.

But this invitation does more than this. It sets in strong light human responsibility. It makes it clear as a sunbeam that man must respond to the voice of God if he would be saved. The prodigal must arise and go to his Father. All his Father's love and compassion will not fetch him home, if he sits still feeding swine in that far-off country of sin and unbelief. We shall be disappointed, brethren, if we expect to be carried into the kingdom of God as Elijah was taken up to heaven. Nor can we drift into the haven of rest. Ah! the current of human tendency and sinful passion will drift us away from God, unless we seize the oars, and pull for our lives.

The history of every lost soul is written in the solemn and pathetic words of the sorrowing Son of man, addressed to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye

will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.”

3. Note, now, the character of this invitation, — “Come unto Me.” As he said in the streets of Jerusalem, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink;” as He said to the woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst,” — so here the Lord Jesus invites the weary and heavy laden to come unto Him for rest.

Blessed words of encouragement and hope to souls bowed down under the weight of sin! The Master calls you to Himself. Fear not to go. Let not conscience hold you back. Every obstacle is removed. The way is open. The path is clear. You may have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. No priesthood intervenes between you and your gracious Redeemer. No saint or angel is needed to make intercession for you. He invites you to come directly to Him, and to come just as you are, without one plea, but that His precious blood has been shed for you. There is not a word here of priestly intervention for the forgiveness of sins. The great High Priest Himself calls us to His feet, re-assuring us by the words, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.”

Observe, the Lord does not say, “Come unto

the Bible,” — though the Bible is the treasure-house of the divine revelations, and the rule of our faith. Neither does He say, “Come unto the Church,” — though the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, God’s witness in the world. Neither does He say, “Come unto the ministers of Christ,” — though they are His ambassadors to men, the messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord. Nor does He say, “Come unto the sacraments,” — though the sacraments are divinely appointed means and channels of grace to the faithful recipients. But He says, “Come unto Me,” because He would teach us that nothing can take the place of personal communion and fellowship with Christ. The Bible, the Church, the Ministry, the Sacraments, are like so many finger-posts, pointing the way to Christ, the Fountain of Living Water. They are very useful to help you to get to Christ, but they are not, and cannot be, substitutes for Christ. Therefore, never be satisfied until you have found Christ Himself ; and be sure you have not rightly used these ordinances of His, unless they lead you to Him. A living faith in a living Lord, a personal application to a personal Redeemer, — this is the heart and core of true religion ; and it is of unspeakable importance that we should maintain day by day this personal relation, this personal communion, with our Lord.

We must read the words of our text, however, in the light of those subsequent words of His, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." When the sinner, oppressed with the burden of his sins, responds to this invitation of the Master, "Come unto Me," he finds a Crucified Saviour; and, gazing on that amazing sight, the burden of his guilt is lifted, and he finds rest unto his soul. Christ on the cross is our peace, our hope, our victory. Why? Because the Cross is the supremest and the sublimest manifestation of the love of the Father, which while displeased with our sin, and suffering by our sin, yet reaches out its arms to reconcile and to save. John Bunyan has well explained this in his immortal allegory: "I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.'"

4. One word now as to the gift promised by the Lord to those who come to Him. It is "rest." Now, the nature of this rest depends upon the nature of the burden we bring. If we come weighed down with care, He gives us rest by

teaching us to “cast all our care upon Him,” and to believe with all our hearts that “He careth for us.” If we come oppressed with a sense of failure in our chosen task, disappointed in some cherished plan, He will teach us that humility is better than success, and that it may best be learned in the school of disappointment; or if we need not this lesson, He will teach us to find our satisfaction in the consciousness of having sought His glory, and desired His approbation, above all other things. If we come staggering under a weight of affliction or bereavement, He will reveal Himself to us as the God of pity and consolation, touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and by and by He will teach us that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Whatever our burden may be, we may be sure that if we come to Him, and take His yoke upon us, we shall sooner or later find rest unto our souls.

But it is of the burden of sin, the grievous and intolerable burden of a guilty conscience, that I would more particularly speak. And I beg you to consider what the teaching of the Lord and His apostles is with reference to this. He offers rest to a soul thus laboring and heavy laden,—rest in the fullest, sweetest sense of the word; deliver-

ance, entire and complete deliverance, from that sore burden. Our church teaches us to pray every day in Lent for “perfect remission and forgiveness.” This is the “rest” that Jesus Christ gives to the penitent soul. It is perfect and complete. It leaves not a spot or a stain behind. “Whiter than snow” is the divine verdict upon the soul that has turned in penitence and faith to the Saviour of sinners. “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” He not only pardons, He also justifies. When He strikes the fetters from the guilty condemned one, He also wipes the stigma of his sin from his brow, and clothes him in the “best robe” of the Father’s grace.

“So vile am I, how dare I hope to stand
In the pure glory of that heavenly land ?

.
Yet on mine ears the gracious tidings fall,
‘ Repent, confess, thou shalt be loosed from all.’

It is the voice of Jesus that I hear ;
His are the hands stretched out to draw me near ;
And His the blood that can for all atone,
And set me faultless there before the throne.”

5. Moreover, this “perfect remission” which the Lord Jesus offers is a free gift, — “Come unto Me, and I will *give* you rest.” The first thought

of an awakened sinner is, “What can I do to make amends for my transgressions? How can I deserve God’s forgiveness? What must I do to be saved?” And the answer of the Redeemer is, “You can do nothing to atone for your sins; you can do nothing to redeem or to save yourself; ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.’” The invitation is, “Come, ye; . . . buy wine and milk, without money and without price;” and the promise is, “Come unto me, and I will *give* you rest.” “Death,” eternal death, is “the wages of sin;” but “eternal life” is “the gift of God,” “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The forgiveness of sin is, therefore, not the prize at the end of the Christian race, nor is it the fruit of our own efforts and deservings, nor is it a blessing consequent upon a holy life, but it is a free and gracious gift bestowed upon every penitent sinner the instant he casts himself upon the mercy of God in Christ. Instead of being the goal of the Christian race, it is the starting-point. Instead of being the fruit of holiness, it is the seed from which holiness is developed. This is the teaching of our Church; for when children come to confirmation, it being taken for granted that they have exercised “repentance whereby they forsake sin, and faith whereby they steadfastly believe the prom-

ises of God," they are then presented to God by the bishop in his prayer as persons to whom He has granted "forgiveness of all their sins." And in such teaching, the Church faithfully reflects the mind of the Spirit. The publican, after that act of contrition and that prayer of penitence in the temple, "went down to his house justified." The prodigal, when he came to himself, and returned to his father, with a broken and a contrite heart, was received at once and with open arms, and the best robe was instantly put on him. The Magdalen, who knelt in tears and shame at the Master's feet, received on the spot her absolution from His lips, — "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Yes, the divine Master first gives us rest from the burden of our guilt, and then takes us into His school of holiness, putting His yoke upon us. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Friends, listen once more to the music of the Gospel in these blessed words of Jesus. It rings out — this sweet-toned bell of the divine mercy —

in the night of bereavement and trouble. It echoes over a sin-cursed, sorrow-laden world. It calls us back, from all our wanderings, home to God. Let us obey its summons, that we may find rest unto our souls. I may speak to some Christian who has never fully entered into this promised land of rest. So many, alas! come within sight of the harbor, but never enter in. There it lies—that haven of rest—in full view: there are the spires and towers of the City of our God; there is the peaceful home of the soul; but like the ship lying outside the bar, waiting for the tide to rise, their entrance into rest is barred by some seemingly impassable obstacle. Dear brethren, do but take into your heart of hearts this invitation and this promise of the Lord Jesus, do but verily believe that He speaks true when He says, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest,” and surely a mighty tide of penitence and faith and love will rise in your souls, and you shall this very hour be carried over the bar and into the long-wished-for haven of rest.

VIII.

THE COÖPERATION OF GOD AND MAN IN SALVATION.

“Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.” — PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13. (Revised Version.)

GOD'S revelation in Holy Scripture, like His revelation in the book of nature, is studded thick with apparent inconsistencies and contradictions, which upon closer and deeper investigation are discovered to be such only in appearance, — to be, in fact, truths complementary to each other, like the different colors in the spectrum, like the major and minor tones in a musical composition. Here, for example, is St. Paul bidding us “work out our own salvation,” as if it was a matter dependent upon our own effort; whereas in another epistle he writes, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. ii. 8, 9); and in yet another place he puts the matter yet more strongly, thus: “To him that

worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 5). But this inconsistency disappears when we observe that the word "salvation" is used in two different significations in Holy Scripture. Sometimes it has reference to deliverance from the penalty of our sins, and the holy displeasure of Almighty God. In that sense we have nothing to do with working out our salvation, for it is worked out for us by another, even Christ; and for participation in it, faith, and faith only, is needed, — faith in the all-atoning efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ "for us men, and for our salvation." Such a faith brings to the believing soul pardon and peace — "justification," without any works or merits of our own. But this salvation from guilt and wrath and punishment looks to a larger and fuller salvation, of which it is the germ, and which is vitally and indissolubly connected with it; and it is in the realization of this that our own efforts and our own works come into play, as one of the instrumentalities leading thereto. In the former sense, salvation is a thing past and finished: "By grace have ye been saved,"¹ says the apostle. We look back to the Cross where it was wrought for us long ago. But in the larger sense it is yet to be wrought out. It lies at the end of

¹ ἔστε σεσωσμένοι is the perfect, not the present, tense.

the Christian race, and is the crown and reward of "patient continuance in well-doing."

Precisely in accord with this distinction, Paul answers the anxious question of the penitent Philippian jailer, by pointing him to the Cross. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" but, writing "to the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi," he exhorts, "Work out your own salvation." When the sinner finds himself hemmed in between the accusations of a guilty conscience, pursuing him like Pharaoh and his host, and the demands of God's righteous law, barring his path as the Red Sea barred the flight of Israel of old, then is heard the word of the Lord, saying, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God," who, by the sacrifice of His well-beloved Son, opens "a way through the sea, and a path through the mighty waters." But when the sea is past, and the pilgrim-life begun, then the man of God points to the Land of Promise, and says, "Ye are well able to go up and possess the land." Canaan was Israel's inheritance by a divine title and by a gracious gift, yet they must gird on every man his sword, and go up and fight for it—for every inch of it. Not otherwise must the Christian fight for his inheritance,—the perfect salvation from sin, which is his Land of Promise. It is indeed God's gift to him through the merits and

mediation of Christ Jesus ; but none the less must he gird up his loins like a man, and go up to take possession of it. Or, to recur to the apostle's language in the text, he must "work out" his own salvation.

1. Let us, then, first of all, emphasize the nature of salvation in its wider sense as a process, a development, a growth, and not an isolated event, or a momentary experience.

We sing sometimes at confirmation when the candidates have made their solemn vow of obedience, and have received the laying on of hands, "'Tis done, the great transaction's done." And, no doubt, it is a "great transaction," that act of deliberately choosing the service of Almighty God, and enlisting under the banner of the Cross ; but it is, after all, only the beginning of the great work of our salvation, the starting-point in that heavenly race which is thenceforward set before us. These Philippian Christians had been converted, baptized, confirmed, and made communicants of the Church : nay, they were so faithful, that the apostle thanked God upon every remembrance of them, and counted them his "joy and crown ;" but for all that, their salvation was yet to be worked out. Yes ; for salvation is not, as so many seem to think, the crossing of a line, but the ascent of the straight and narrow path, ever

upward and onward, "nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!" It is the evolution of character. It is an ethical and spiritual growth toward an ideal standard. It is deliverance from the power as well as the penalty of sin; and not only this, but the elevation and transformation of the whole man into a pure and noble manhood. It is, in a word, the forming of the Christ within us, the hope of glory.

Thus we must distinguish broadly between "conversion" and "salvation." The one is the first faint streak of morning light in the eastern horizon: the other is the full radiance of the noonday sun. Conversion is the first blade of wheat that appears above the ground: salvation is the yellow, ripened grain, waiting for the sickle of the reaper. Conversion is the first stone in the foundation of the temple: salvation is the finished structure, the holy and beautiful house, all glorious within, and resounding through all its arches with the praise of God.

2. Let us next note the temper of mind in which a Christian should work out his salvation, — "with fear and trembling." But how does this consist with St. John's teaching, that "perfect love casteth out fear"? Or with St. Paul's own words elsewhere, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear"? Or with the filial confi-

dence that characterizes the New Dispensation? Have we, indeed, come to another Sinai, and not to Mount Zion? The answer is plain. St. John is speaking in that place of the fear that "hath torments," and St. Paul also, in the last passage quoted, of the same kind of fear, — the fear of the slave, or of the condemned offender, or of those who, like Israel of old, have not yet been granted the revelation of the gracious Fatherhood of God, and who, therefore, behold Him afar off, clothed in awful majesty, "the great and dreadful God." But St. Paul in our text is speaking of a holy, reverential fear which is not at all inconsistent with filial trust, — such a feeling as the apostolic churches of Judæa and Galilee and Samaria cherished when they walked "in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ix. 31).

Two things demand here our thoughtful attention. There is reason to fear that the popular representations of the gospel lead men to put asunder what God hath joined together, — "the fear of the Lord," and "the comfort of the Holy Ghost." We must beware of an unholy familiarity in our thoughts of God, and of Him who is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." So dazzling was the holiness and the majesty of Christ, that when St. John beheld Him

in vision, he fell at His feet as dead. And though we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God;" and though we, who were once afar off, are "made nigh" by the blood of Jesus, and have access "with boldness" to the throne of grace,—yet the nearer we approach unto Him, the more perfect is the revelation of His holiness, and hence the deeper grows our sense of our own imperfection and unworthiness. Christian biography confirms this view, and shows, that, as men walk more closely with God, they ever grow in humility and godly fear.

Our text, however, has more direct reference to the "fear and trembling" which arises from a distrust of self born of a vivid perception of the magnitude of the interests involved, the difficulties of the work, the dangers that surround its execution, the might and malice of our great Adversary, and the weakness of our mortal nature. It is the church of Laodicea (whose spiritual state is all but hopeless) that says, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." It is the holy apostle (for whom an amaranthine crown is waiting) who says, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark." Nay, more than this, "I keep

under my body, and bring it into subjection : lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The full assurance of faith goes hand in hand with the spirit of humility, of holy "fear and trembling." The feeling intended by the apostle in the text is not unlike that with which the captain of a great ocean-steamer paces the bridge on a dark and stormy night. However fearless he may be, and however skilful a navigator, when he thinks of the unseen dangers of the deep, and reflects upon the tremendous responsibility that rests upon him ; when he considers the precious cargo of human lives intrusted to his care, and realizes that its safety depends upon his vigilance, and skill and promptness in meeting any emergency that may arise, —he will enter upon his watch "with fear and trembling." Even so the Christian should be impressed every day with the greatness of his responsibility in steering his course over the dangerous sea of life. He should constantly remind himself of the preciousness of the immortal interests committed to his care, of the danger of making shipwreck of such a cargo, and of the need of diligence and vigilance if he would reach in safety the haven where he would be.

3. Pass we now to the central thought of our text, the statement that "it is God which worketh

in you both the willing and the working." This implies in the first place the futility of human effort apart from the grace of God, and it suggests that human effort should be made in conscious dependence on that grace. The shore of life is strewn with moral wrecks caused by departure from this cardinal principle. Man without God is a branch cut off from the vine, a tree severed from the root, a flower shut up in a dark cellar. "Apart from Me," said Christ, "ye can do nothing." And Christ is "God manifest in the flesh," "God with us." Men have forgotten this. I speak not only of moralists and philosophers and theorists, but of Christians. Probably I speak to some disciples of Christ to-day, whose spiritual history is a record of failure, and whose spiritual development has been arrested, if their spiritual life has not been starved and stifled, by practical neglect of this great root principle. You have labored, but in your own strength. You have set yourself to reach a noble ideal of life, but in dependence on self, on the force of your own will, on the steadfastness of your own resolutions. Here is your story:—

"You thought by efforts of your own,
To take at last each jarring tone
Out of your life, till all should meet
In one majestic music sweet ;

And deemed that in your own heart's ground
The root of good was to be found,
And that by careful watering,
And earnest tendance, we might bring
The bud, the blossom, and the fruit,
To grow and flourish from that root.

But, thanks to Heaven, it is not so :
That root a richer soil doth know
Than our poor hearts could e'er supply ; —
That stream is from a source more high ;
From God it came, to God returns,
Not nourished from our scanty urns,
But fed from His unfailing river,
Which runs, and will run on forever.”¹

Notice now the apostle's reasoning: “Work out your own salvation ; *for* it is God which worketh in you.” He encourages us to put forth all our strength in this great endeavor after “salvation,” by the assurance that the omnipotence of God is engaged on our behalf in the sacred undertaking. But this is to reverse the reasoning men commonly use. One man will say, “If God is working in me, if He has taken my salvation in hand, my efforts are as unnecessary as they are vain.” Another will say, “If I must work out my own salvation, then my dependence must plainly be, not on God, but on my own diligence and perseverance.” The apostle challenges both

¹ Archbishop Trench.

conclusions, and urges the certainty of the divine co-operating grace as an encouragement and a stimulus to human effort. "Work out your own salvation; for it is God which worketh in you." We strive—and fail! We resolve—and break our resolution! We pray—and do not follow up our prayer with earnest endeavor! We press toward the mark—and presently we stumble and fall, and our ideal seems farther away than ever, seems to mock us like the mirage in the desert! And we are disheartened, and ready to abandon, as fruitless, the labor of our "salvation." "It's no use," we say to ourselves: "I cannot attain; I cannot rise; my earthly nature drags me down; the demon ever triumphs over the angel in me. I might as well abandon the attempt."—"Hold!" cries the apostle, "what is it you are about to do? Give up the work of your salvation, when God is at hand to work in you and with you, even to the very desires and intents of the heart? Sit down in despair, when God has risen up to your help? Rather rise to your feet, and strive with unconquerable energy, with inextinguishable hope, to reach the prize of your high calling, because behind your weak endeavor is the all-sufficient grace of God, because 'underneath are the Everlasting Arms.'"

There is indeed a deep mystery here, a mystery

which no plummet-line of metaphysic wit or theologic skill has ever fathomed. The sovereign grace of God working in us, and our human freedom, choosing, laboring, working out our salvation — how are these two thoughts to be reconciled? I answer, What if we cannot reconcile them? What if we can do no more than recognize each as a truth, without seeing how they consist in harmony? We can still clearly discern the two poles of the great Sphere of Truth, though clouds hide the equator from our view. We know God is sovereign over all — that is one pole. We know man is free — that is the other. How to combine these into one harmonious whole, we know not. Nor, for the practical purposes of life and conduct, is it at all necessary that we should know. It is a mystery indeed, but one which finds analogy in the most familiar processes of Nature. The husbandman drops a seed into the open furrow, and seems to say, “Germinate; take root; spring up; bear fruit; work out your own salvation.” But what could that little seed do, unless the earth, into whose bosom it is cast, and the sun that shines upon it, and the rain that descends from heaven, worked upon it and worked with it, to produce the ripened grain for the harvestman? Even so, God’s Church in whose bosom we are nurtured, and God’s Son whose blessed light shines in His Word, and God’s

Spirit whose gentle dew falls unseen upon the soul, all work in us and with us to bring forth the fruit of good-living.

4. But the medallion of truth has an obverse side, which we must by no means neglect to examine. We have dwelt upon the divine side of the work of our salvation; let us turn now to the human side. If it is true that human effort without God is futile, it is equally true that without human effort salvation is impossible. God works in us, but we must work with God. Consider, then, the import of the exhortation, "Work out your own salvation." It calls for diligence, earnestness, laborious effort. It recalls the dear Lord's own words, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." These solemn words mean something,—and something very different from the easy-going Christianity which we see around us on every side. They make it plain that the prize of our high calling is not to be won without diligent and persevering effort. They should convince us that the working out of our salvation—that is, the attainment of the Christlikeness—is

no mere side-show to the serious business of life, but is itself the chief business, the most momentous concern of every man's life, to which his energies should be primarily and principally directed.

You demand, perhaps, how such a principle as this can be carried out. Shall men abandon their worldly business in order to devote themselves to the business of their salvation? Shall women forsake their homes for the "cloistered cell," in order to achieve holiness? Is asceticism the just corollary to the principles laid down by Jesus Christ? Not so; for this is God's world. The family is from God. Society is from God. The state is from God. Civilization is from God. The arts and sciences are from God. Christ came not to crucify human nature, but to redeem it, to regenerate it, to transform it. And we shall best work out our salvation by using life in all its fulness and in all its variety as the scaffold on which to stand while we build the temple of the living God in our lives. We will not abandon our earthly pursuits, but we will follow them with a different purpose, with a different spirit. We will look upon all life's activities as instrumentalities for accomplishing this great ulterior aim, the working out of our salvation. We will no longer be as bricklayers, caring only to finish our daily task, and to earn our daily wage, but we shall catch the spirit

and the meaning of the great Architect's plan ; and all the while that we are laying our bricks, we shall have in our hearts the joy of knowing that we are building a house in the which it will please God to dwell.

But on what principle, or by what method, shall we order our lives to attain such an end ? Look at Doré's picture of Christ entering Jerusalem. See the vast number of figures that he has placed on his canvas, — friends and foes ; Jews, Greeks, Romans, Ethiopians. See the variety of color and costume and posture, as well as of age and of race and of religion. And then note, how, in the midst of all this diversity, there is unity, — how all these manifold lines of expression converge to a single focus, — how all the personages on the canvas are subordinated to the glorious central figure of the Christ, as all eyes are turned to Him in interest, in wonder, or in adoration. Let us learn here a lesson in the art of living, — to put Christ in the centre of our lives, and to make all the occupations and all the activities of life subordinate to Him, subject to His will, — pressing even the drudgery of life into His service, as the ass on which He may be pleased to ride, and bidding the small things as well as the great things, the secular things as well as the sacred, business and pleasure as well as prayer and

praise, join in the cry, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

Or, again, see the same thought expressed and the same lesson enforced in Handel's great composition, *The Messiah*. Here, too, we have variety in unity, — the joyous chorale, the soft pastoral symphony, the sublime hallelujah chorus: but one all-controlling thought dominates the whole, — the Messiah suffering, dying, rising, reigning. From this all proceeds, to this all again returns. So should it be in every human life. Do not banish the sound of mirth and gladness, as if this would best glorify God. Do not narrow the range of its activity, as though that would lead you into the straight and narrow way. Do not reduce its expression to the monotone of distinctively religious ideas and religious acts, as if only one note in the scale of human thought and feeling were acceptable to God. But aim to bring all the notes of human experience, and all the voices of human aspiration, into harmony with the one central thought of the love of God in Christ Jesus; set Him in the midst, as the Lord of all, and thus make your lives one unbroken Oratorio of the Messiah.

A life ordered on this principle will be as far removed from the severity of the stoic and the

narrowness of the ascetic, as from the self-indulgence of the epicurean or the earthly-mindedness of the worldling. It will escape equally the ignoble contentment which knows no aspiration after progress or improvement, which hears no "Excelsior" summoning it to heights of thought or of action, and the unholy restlessness which chafes and murmurs at the conditions in which divine wisdom has fixed its lot, and which in vainly aspiring after some great thing overlooks the dignity and the glory of common life, and misses once for all its opportunity. This last is indeed a fatal mistake, and perhaps it is of all others the most common. For, in the working out of our salvation, we are to look for our material in the events, the circumstances, the opportunities, the trials, the duties, the temptations, of every-day experience. We are weaving "the mystic web" of life as the servants of the great Master, and all that His providence and His wisdom appoints is part of the raw material out of which the tapestry is to be woven. It is not for us to choose our work, but to do it in that state of life to which He has seen fit to call us. We may not complain that the fibre is too coarse, or that the colors are too dark. The selection of these is the Master's part, ours only to take what He pleases to give, and weave it as best we may. We cannot see

how each event, each experience, is worked into the great whole, and contributes to the perfection of His design. No ; for, like the weavers, we are working on the wrong side ; and we must wait for time, or else eternity, to show us the meaning of each, and the relation it sustains to the end in view. Only when the evening comes, and the shadows fall, and the machinery stops, and the shuttles cease, and the web is taken down and turned, shall we see the full meaning of our work. But then we *shall* see that all the strange and sometimes mysterious dispensations of the divine providence were necessary for the completion and perfection of the design — the weaving into the texture of our human lives the divine image of the Christ — “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

“The years of man are the looms of God,
Let down from the place of the sun,
Wherein we all are weaving
Till the mystic web is done ;
Weaving blindly, but weaving surely,
Each for himself his fate ;
We may not see how the right side looks,
We can only weave and wait.
But looking above for the pattern,
No weaver has need to fear ;
Only let him look clear into heaven —
The perfect Pattern is there.
If he keep the face of the Master

Forever and always in sight,
His toil shall be sweeter than honey,
And his weaving will be sure to be right :
And when his work is ended,
And the web is turned and shown,
He shall hear the voice of the Master ;
It will say to him, ' Well done ! ' ”

IX.

SECRET PRAYER.

"Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door, and pray to thy Father." — MATTHEW vi. 6.

TAKING occasion from the hypocrisy which He saw around Him, of men who prayed in public places, "in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, just that they might be seen of men," Jesus uttered this impressive precept upon a subject which nearly concerns every one of us. Prayer, — its meaning, its method, its spirit, its object, its reward, — what can more vitally affect our interests, our happiness, our character, our destiny for time and eternity? We may understand all wisdom and all knowledge, but if we know not how to pray, we are miserably and pitifully ignorant. We may be rich and increased with goods, but as Lazarus in his rags, and with his sores, eating his dinner of refuse food, was better off than Dives wearing purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, so it cannot be doubted, that, if we live without prayer, we are wretchedly poor. We may be surrounded by a

loving circle of friends and relatives, and hold no mean place in society, or in the world, but if we have no communion with God through prayer, we are desolate indeed. In that case we have no living source of strength for the burdens of life, no safe refuge from care and anxiety, no unfailing fountain of refreshment in the hour of weakness, no security against being overwhelmed by the losses and disasters incident to human life, no shield against temptation, no anchor of the soul in the hour of death and the day of judgment! For in prayer, man realizes that he is not an orphan on the desert of time, but a child of God, and an heir of His kingdom. By prayer is he girded as with an impenetrable armor against the shafts of adversity and the fiery darts of the Evil One. By prayer he mounts as in a chariot of fire to the very paradise of God, disarming the cherubim who stand at its gates with their flaming swords, and plucks the fruit of the Tree of Life. By prayer he climbs as on the ladder which Jacob saw, with angels as his helpers, to the Invisible and the Infinite. How deeply, then, does it concern us to ask with the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Now, the first thing taught us in the text, is the importance of secrecy, or at least privacy, in prayer. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into

thy closet, and shut thy door." Why? It would be preposterous to understand this precept as a prohibition of public prayer, of the worship of the great congregation, or of the social circle. It would be equally absurd to suppose that the Lord meant to teach men to make a secret of the fact that they prayed. On the other hand, it would be a very inadequate conception of the passage to take it as merely a caution against hypocrisy — against praying to be seen of men. No, the Lord's words go much beyond this. He would teach us that silence and solitude are handmaids of devotion. Prayer is a serious business, and must be set about with purpose and deliberation. It is the approach of a sinful creature to the great Creator and Judge of all the earth. It should, therefore, be done with humility and reverence, with concentration of the faculties of mind and heart upon the act. For this reason, "enter into thy closet, and . . . shut thy door." Shut out the world and its business; shut out, if possible, distracting thoughts and cares; shut out interruptions of friends or servants or children. Let your secret oratory be a "closet," — a place shut in, where none may intrude, where you may be alone with your Maker; a spot like the mountain-top where Moses was with God forty days and forty nights; like the cave where Elijah heard the still small

voice of God's Holy Spirit; like the wilderness where John the Baptist pondered and prayed till he was ready for his work; like the solitary place to which the Lord Jesus withdrew for prayer a great while before day. Let the hour be consecrated, set apart from common uses, sacred from intrusion. Let it be as an appointment to meet the Great King: then surely you will feel that you cannot allow yourself to be interrupted.

Doubtless we may lift up our hearts in prayer anywhere, and at any time; and no petition is more acceptable to God than that which darts like an arrow to heaven from the midst of our worldly business, or our social enjoyments, for guidance or for deliverance. Happy is the man who has learned to pray always, to cover himself at all times with prayer, as with a shield—to weave, as it were, a network of prayer over his whole life, so that his feet shall never escape from the restraining influence of divine grace. But such momentary acts of devotion are not sufficient. A vigorous and healthy religious life can only be sustained by prolonged seasons of prayer and meditation. The spirit of prayer may be the Christian's "vital breath;" but the consecrated hour in which he withdraws from the world to commune with God in the secret place,—this is his daily bread, without which his religion will soon lan-

guish and die. This busy age, active, anxious, restless in its pursuit, whether of knowledge, or of gain, or of pleasure, begrudges the time given to the exercises of devotion in the closet. Even when a man has shut his door in order to be alone with God, it will interrupt, and tempt him away to what it calls the "practical duties of life." What with the din of the world, and the demands of business, and the engagements of pleasure, it is no easy thing to obey this precept of Jesus, and protect the devotional hour from intrusion. But depend upon it, my friends, it is essential, I will not say to a happy Christian life, or to a vigorous one, or to a peaceful one, but to any real positive Christianity at all. Family-worship cannot take its place. The public worship of the Church cannot take its place. What is vaguely called "church-work" cannot take its place. Even deeds of charity and benevolence cannot take its place.

There is no substitute for secret prayer, nor is there any thing in the offices of religion so important. It is the power-wheel of every genuine Christian life. Nay, it is more. It is the motive-power itself. Look at one of those enormous ocean-steamers as she moves swiftly and majestically on her way. What is it which drives that huge mass of iron through the water at that rapid rate of speed? Of course, it is not the wind—

though the sails may all be set, and drawing well. You say, perhaps, it is the screw — the propeller with its great flanges of tempered steel ; but the propeller is only the instrument, it has no power in itself ; all that comes from a hidden source. Deep down in the heart of the great ship, there is a fire which is kept constantly burning ; and it is that which generates the power which sets the ponderous machinery in motion, which in its turn drives the monster ship on her way. Such a hidden source of power is secret prayer in the Christian life. This it is, and not the visible machinery of religion, which generates the power which drives the Church forward on her mission of salvation. And this it is also which, unseen by men, gives to each true Christian the spiritual power whereby he overcomes the waves of ungodliness and sin, and moves on to the harbor of God's saints.

Now, a somewhat extended and careful observation of the habits of professing Christian people has convinced me that there is a very general neglect of this precept of Christ. I do not mean that we do not say our prayers, or that we entirely neglect to retire to our chambers for secret prayer, but that we attach too little importance to the silence and solitude which our Lord recommends to us as handmaids to devotion ; that we

do not habitually set apart a time for the morning and evening prayer, and insist upon keeping it free from interruption ; and above all, I mean that we do not make secret prayer the important and serious business which the man Christ Jesus made it, and which He clearly implies we also should make it. Too often we deserve the divine rebuke, — “Thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob ; thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel.”

The causes of this neglect are not far to seek. 1. Unbelief as one of them. We do not half believe God's promises. Range through the Scriptures, and mark what is promised to humble, faithful, persevering prayer. Read the volume of Christian experience as it is written in the lives of multitudes of God's people, and see how those promises have been fulfilled. Ponder your own experience, and say if prayer has not often refreshed and strengthened your spirit, cleared away the darkness, opened for you fountains in the desert. Oh, wonderful things have been wrought by prayer, even in this our day ! It has removed mountains of difficulty from the path of the Christian. It has plucked up deep-rooted trees of habit and inclination, and cast them into the sea. Like the rod of Moses has it often been in the hand of a man of God. By it has a path been made through a sea of troubles and adversities,

and a way shown to Elim where are found the fountains of God's refreshment, and the palm-trees of His grace and peace. By it hath the stony rock been opened, and waters of comfort given in the wilderness. We may say of prayer as Jeremy Taylor said, "It can open the windows of heaven, and shut the gates of hell. It can put a holy constraint upon God, and detain an angel till he leave a blessing." We assent, I suppose, to all this. Some of us even know it to be true from our own experience. And yet, we lose the vividness of our faith in the blessing of secret prayer. Our sense of its value grows faint. Dulness and lethargy steal over our perception of it, and so we relapse into a half-hearted assent to the power and the privilege of prayer; or worse, we even forget what it has been to us, and so we grow formal and stiff and cold in our prayers, because for the time we have fallen under the power of unbelief. What wonder, then, if we neglect this solemn precept of the Lord,—*"Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door, and pray to thy Father"*?

2. Another cause of the neglect of secret prayer is indolence. It requires exertion to pray. It involves the tension of our faculties to resolutely shut the door of the mind against the intrusion of worldly thoughts, and then to turn the soul to the contemplation of God, and the earnest approach

to His footstool. Prayer is really the highest exercise of the mental and spiritual faculties. It is often realized only by strong effort. To consider one's needs, and cry to God to relieve them; to discover one's sins and frailties, and cry to God to pardon them; to meditate upon the divine character till the soul kindles into adoration and praise,—ah, these are exercises to which indolence is averse! And, besides, to secure the hour of secret prayer, or the half-hour, often requires self-denial. It means rising earlier, and despatching the first duties of the morning with energy. It means redeeming the time, and resolutely turning aside from idle conversation, or from the book or the newspaper which we are eager to read: all this and more is often involved in obeying the Lord's command, "Enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father." But against this the flesh rebels. "Nine out of ten human beings are naturally disposed to be intensely idle; and this idleness creeps over the renewed nature, and lulls it into drowsiness and sloth. We are often too idle for the effort of sustained prayer. We are often too idle, steadily and thoughtfully to study our Bibles. We are often too idle to interest ourselves in bearing the burdens or healing the sorrows of those around us."¹ But, now, how are we to overcome this

¹ The Bishop of Rochester.

sloth, this idleness, this unbelief? There are several things which may help us here. First, there is the consideration of the melancholy consequence of the neglect of prayer. Norman McLeod has truly said, "As to distraction in prayer, how I know this, and have to struggle against it! But it is not good, and dare not be allowed; but it must be conquered. I speak as a man who looks back with horror at my carelessness in secret prayer. Backsliding begins in the closet, and ends — where?" Yes, my brethren, nothing is more certain than the connection between backsliding and the neglect of prayer. They are linked together as cause and effect. This is why we are so often cold and indifferent. This is why we walk with such uncertain step in our Christian life. This is why there is so much unreality in our religious experience. This is the secret of so many inconsistencies in the conduct of professing Christians. There is an alarming but logical progression observable. First lukewarmness, then indifference, then coldness, then open inconsistency, then deliberate transgression, and the last step is either apostasy or hypocrisy. The downward progress may be very slow; but whether by slow stages, or by sudden downfall, the law of decadence is at work, and, unless checked, it will end in spiritual ruin.

My brethren, I point you, as I point myself, to this fatal gulf ; and I pray you, as you would avoid being precipitated to the backslider's doom, remember and obey the command of the Lord Jesus, "Enter into thy closet, . . . and shut thy door, and pray to thy Father." But there is another, and I venture to hope a more constraining, argument, by which you and I may be stirred up to resist the unbelief and the sloth and the self-indulgence which rob us of our consecrated hours of devotion. I have conjured you by the awful consequences of the neglect of prayer. Now I beseech you by the blessing and the peace and the joy which flow from these periods of solitary communion with God — "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." This is the sure word of promise which fell from the lips of Jesus. Consider it well. Ah ! it comes to us illustrated by the testimony of an innumerable host of witnesses, the blessed company of the apostles and prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the Holy Church throughout the world ; and all with united voice bear witness that "God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

The secret place where they have daily sought communion with God has been to His people as the cleft of the rock in which Moses was hid while the Lord's presence and glory passed by. It has

been as the pavilion which the Lord spread over His servant, the king of Israel, a shelter from the strife of tongues and from the unbelief and the misunderstanding of men. It has been "as a hiding place from the wind, as a covert from the storm, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Here have they fled for refuge, and the angel of the Lord has thrown around them the shield of the Almighty. Here have they come weary and heavy laden, and Jesus has given them rest. Here have they come in their weakness, ready to faint and fall, and Jesus has given them strength. Here have they brought their cares, their burdens, their sorrows, and have learned to cast them on Him who careth for His people, the Eternal God who is their refuge, and whose everlasting arms are underneath them.

X.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TONGUE.

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” — ST. JAMES i. 26.

AT the Stephens Institute, Hoboken, there is a testing department devoted to the business of testing the quality of oils and other substances; and I am told it is a very lucrative business, since it is a matter of great importance to large numbers of people to have a scientific and impartial test of the quality of the articles alluded to. There is an oil, however, which is not quoted in the markets, though it is of the greatest value, and which is not tested at any of our institutes, though to be sure of its quality is a thing of unspeakable moment. It is that oil which many of us — who, like the virgins in the parable, have gone forth to meet the Bridegroom — are supposed to have taken in our vessels with our lamps. But it is of the last importance, that we should know the quality of this our oil, whether it is genuine, or no, whether it will burn on through the night of

death and trial, or will prove spurious or adulterated oil, so that when the cry is heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," and we arise and trim our lamps, we find that they burn low, and go out, and leave us in the darkness.

Now the Bible furnishes the tests whereby we may ascertain its genuineness. Here is one of them given by St. James in our text. Sometimes a single chemical test is sufficient to settle the quality of an article: so it is here. If our oil cannot stand this test, it is not pure. "If any man among you seem [i.e., seem to himself] to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." The government of the tongue is the test of the genuineness of a man's religion. He who puts not a bridle on his tongue deceives himself, if he supposes that the oil in his vessel is pure. Let such a man know that "his religion is vain." On the other hand, if a man perfectly bridle his tongue, he is not only a sincere but a perfect Christian; for as the apostle teaches us in another place (iii. 2), "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." In other words, when the tongue is not bridled at all, there is no religion; but when it is perfectly bridled, there is perfect religion. Happy the man who, while he cannot attain the second of these

states, is yet able to escape the first. Perhaps none of us dare hope that he shall ever be able to claim that he offends not at all by word. Even Moses "spake unadvisedly with his lips," and because he thus failed to bridle his tongue was excluded from the promised land. But in some fair degree to put a bridle upon the tongue, and to be for the most part its ruler, not its servant, this is something which is possible by God's grace for us all. Our Lord Himself has warned us that we shall give account for our words as well as our acts in the Day of Judgment. Yes, every idle word shall then be subject of inquisition by the All-searching Judge. "For by thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." So also the Psalmist, "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile." And the wise man compares a wholesome tongue to a tree of life, giving this salutary precept: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles."

But one may ask, Why should the tongue be bridled? And what is there in the bridling of it, which carries such significance, that it is alone the sufficient and crucial test of the quality of a man's religion? The tongue is surely a marvellous in-

strument, and the power of speech something most noble and most admirable. It is one of man's chief distinctions in physiological structure from the brutes. Other animals have voice, but none but man has the power of articulate speech. This vehicle of great thoughts and deep emotions and high purposes; this, which sometimes becomes a chariot of fire in which the soul is rapt to the heavens; this, which, itself a material thing, in a manner most mysterious becomes the incarnation of the spiritual—of ideas, of emotions, and desires; this, which, though only a cadenced vibration of the air, possesses, at times, the power as of an angel of God to stir the waters of the soul to their depths,—why should speech be restrained? why should the tongue, which is its instrument, be bridled?

I give three reasons. First, because the power of speech, which is the use of the tongue, involves a very grave responsibility. It may not be exercised lightly or thoughtlessly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Oh, speech is too great a thing to be trifled with, too powerful an agent for weal or woe to be carelessly used! It is easy to utter a word, but it is not in the power of man to stop its vibrations: they echo on round the world, it may be; down through the ages, it may be! Who shall tell the influence of a lightly spoken word?

The man of science tells us the vibrations of the air which we produce in speech are transmitted on through the centuries. So is it oftentimes with the influence of an idle, or a sinful, or a hasty, word: once spoken, who shall recall it? or who shall put a period to its influence for evil? Not one. In the Alps the traveller is sometimes bidden by his experienced guide to avoid speaking, because under certain conditions the vibrations of the voice may precipitate the terrible avalanche. The hasty or the intemperate word, or even the whispered slander, has often precipitated great crises in history, which have involved myriads in misery, and oftener has brought down on men, in their social or domestic life, an avalanche of ills and woes. Well says the wise man, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

I give you a second reason why the tongue should be bridled; because the tongue both makes and reveals the man. If it makes the man, then it ought to be bridled lest it make him ill. If it reveals him, then the bridling of it so that it shall not transgress its proper limit, is a fair test of the quality of a man's religion. The tongue, I say, makes the man. Yes, for the influence of speech is reflex as well as direct. No word is spoken but leaves its impress behind it upon the lips that utter it, before it can exercise any influence upon

the ear that hears it. When thoughts which have lain in the mind quiescent or unformed, or at least undeveloped, are brought to birth in words, they become living entities ; and as the child exercises an influence on the mother who bore it, so assuredly our words exert an influence over us, a very real and lasting influence. And if they be false words, or impure words, or uncharitable words, or ungodly words, or unbelieving words, their influence will be baleful. So spake He who knew what was in man, as none else ever knew. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man ; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Remember this ! your words defile you, if they be themselves unholy or unclean or untrue. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee," said the maid to Simon Peter. But it does more than that : your speech goes to form your character. Your conversation is not only the index of what you are, it is also the instrument by which you become what you are. You will grow largely what your words make you, light and trifling, unstable and unreliable, fickle and false, peevish and irritable, impure and ungodly, if your talk be such. I say, therefore, again, the tongue makes the man. Then, let it be bridled, let it be controlled, let it be wisely regulated.

It is also the expression of the man. It reveals

him, tells what he really is. Yes, though he may train his tongue to deceit, misrepresentation, prevarication, suppression of the truth, even downright falsehood, yet in the end, and on the whole, the tongue will be the expression of the man. No man can be false always. Life is so constituted that it is impossible to make deceit and untruth the rule of speech. The mask worn in public must commonly be laid aside in private. And not only so: the habit of concealing the truth, and assuming a character which is unreal, will beget a habit of tortuous and indirect expression which by and by will reveal the man. However, to himself every man's words will reveal him; and this is what we are chiefly concerned to show. The apostle offers a test by which we can determine the nature and quality of our religion. If you think yourself to be religious, for how many reasons soever, and yet find that you do not bridle your tongue,—do not restrain it from deception, from impurity, from slander, from uncharitableness,—then know certainly that your religion is vain. “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned.”

I offer a third, and it is the chief reason, why the tongue ought to be bridled,—because of its wild and ungovernable nature, and its great and peculiar power for mischief. It is more untamable

than the lion or any beast of the forest, than the eagle or any bird of the air, than leviathan or any monster of the deep. "Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison" (Jas. iii.). This language is none too strong. The twelve labors of Hercules were easier than the task of subduing and controlling the tongue at all seasons and under all circumstances. Curbed at one point, — profanity, for instance, — it will break out at another. Subdued to-day, it will break its fetters to-morrow. Docile under the influence of reason and reflection in the quiet of the chamber or the closet, it will suddenly become fierce and ungovernable under some unexpected provocation, at some undeserved slight or rebuke. To be silent under an irritating affront, may be the only security from an outburst of passion; but how hard is it at such a time to bridle the tongue! To follow the example of Jesus, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, is the only Christian course; but how hard to hold in by any leash of human resolution the tongue, which is like a bloodhound panting to leap upon his prey! To take it patiently when we suffer for well-doing, to turn away wrath by a soft answer, is hard indeed; but when we are stung by the consciousness

that we are in the wrong, and when our pride is wounded, our hopes disappointed, our interests compromised, our self-love mortified, then how true we find it, that the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison ! And yet it is precisely under such circumstances that it is of paramount importance that the tongue should be ruled, because, if once it gets the bit between its teeth, it hurries us away into acts and words which only aggravate the difficulties of our situation.

But, besides being thus ungovernable, the tongue possesses peculiar power for mischief. The same apostle compares it to a fire. Its importance he had illustrated by comparing it to the bit, which turns the horse whichever way his rider pleases ; and, again, to the rudder, which, though so small, turns about a great ship, at the pleasure of the helmsman. Then, to illustrate the great power of evil possessed by this little member, he compares it to a little fire which sets a great forest ablaze : “ Behold, how great a forest a little fire kindleth.”¹ A hunter in the Adirondacks drops a spark from his pipe, and soon that little spark has kindled the whole mountains into flame, and for weeks the fire burns on, filling the land with smoke by day, and lighting up all the heavens with its lurid glare by night, until at length it dies for want of fuel to

¹ Jas. iii. 5. See original.

feed on. And the tongue, says St. James, little as it is, is likewise destructive. "It is a fire, a world of iniquity." Often some spark from a hasty or an inconsiderate tongue has set a whole neighborhood on fire, and the flame of hatred has smouldered on for a generation, till all first concerned in the feud have passed away. Often some spark from an unruly tongue has kindled in a household a spirit of petulancy and peevishness, which has scorched all the sweet, tender grass and fragrant flowers of domestic love and fellowship.

It is recorded of Samson, that "he went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails ; and when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives." But one slanderous tongue in a community will sometimes do more damage than the three hundred foxes with their one hundred and fifty firebrands : it will burn up the fruits of the spirit, — love, joy, peace, good will. Well says the son of Sirach, "Curse the whisperer and double-tongued : for such have destroyed many that were at peace. A backbiting tongue hath disquieted many, and driven them from nation to nation : strong cities hath it pulled down, and overthrown

the houses of great men. . . . The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh : but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword : but not so many as have fallen by the tongue. Well is he that is defended from it, and hath not passed through the venom thereof ; who hath not drawn the yoke thereof, nor hath been bound in her bands. For the yoke thereof is a yoke of iron, and the bands thereof are bands of brass. The death thereof is an evil death, the grave were better than it " (Ecclus. xxviii. 13, 14, 17-21).

And then, the tongue possesses this peculiarity, that it draws all the members and all the faculties after it in its transgression. As the apostle puts it, "So is the tongue among our members that it defileth the whole body." Yes, let the tongue go unbridled, and it will run away with all the other members : it will inflame the eye with passion ; it will hurry the feet into paths of revenge ; it will arm the hand with the instruments of hatred. He who bridleth not his tongue need not think to govern his temper, or to restrain his hands from evil, or to walk in the paths of peace. As poison quickly permeates the blood, as the fire sweeps on the wings of the wind over the prairie, so the tongue inflames the whole man : to use again the language of St. James, "It setteth on fire the

course of nature," — the whole compass of man's being, the circumference of his corporeal powers. But wherefore? Whence does it derive this fatal power? The apostle reveals the reason when he adds, "and it is set on fire of hell." Terrible thought, yet one which it is well to remember in all its fearful significance. Spirits from the bottomless pit set the tongue on fire. All the devils which tempt and ruin men use it for their instrument, — the demon of hate, the demon of revenge, the demon of pride, the demon of blasphemy, the demon of uncleanness, the demon of envy, the demon of slander, the demon of lying, the demon of discontent, the demon of impatience. All these and many more find in the tongue their ready instrument: rising from the bottomless pit, they set the tongue on fire, and it sets the whole course of nature on fire, and so the will of hell is worked on earth by men made in the image of God. Oh the pity! oh the shame! That this which the Psalmist well calls "the best member that we have," should thus be made the tool of Satan! That speech — that high prerogative of man, whereby he is in his bodily structure chiefly distinguished from the brutes — should be made the means of bestializing, yea, demonizing, this heir of immortality! That the tongue, which was made to sing God's praise, and to publish His glory, and

to speak good of His name, should be turned into an instrument of profanity and blasphemy, of murmuring and unbelief! That the tongue, I say, so wondrously gifted as a means of fellowship and of the communication of knowledge; the tongue, which was attuned for the accents of charity and benevolence, of pity and compassion, should become the foul instrument of disseminating lies, of stirring up strife, of destroying the peace of families, the good-fellowship of neighborhoods, the harmony of nations; should become the channel of all that is false and impure and cruel! Yet to such sad ends does sin turn the gracious purposes of the God of Love.

Certainly, then, my brethren, if all this be true of the power of the tongue for evil, it is most plain why it is before all things necessary that it should be bridled by him who would be a servant of God. Let us learn to bear in mind the great responsibility of speech in its relations to the happiness of others; let us never forget that the tongue both makes and reveals the man; and let us reflect that it is possessed of infinite power for evil; since it is a fire, a very world of iniquity, and is set on fire of hell. He who rightly considers these things will not only be scrupulous always to avoid falsehood and profanity and obscenity and malicious slanders, but he will put a bridle upon

his tongue in many other ways : he will be very careful not to speak evil of his neighbor, even though true, except when duty or charity requires ; he will not repeat the chatterings of gossip ; he will be slow to speak. He will set a watch at the door of his lips, and will allow nothing to pass which cannot give the countersign of truth and purity and charity. He will remember the counsel of the son of Sirach, "Weigh thy words in a balance, and make a door and bar for thy mouth." He will restrain his tongue from the beginnings of impatience, petulance, and anger : he will also rein in his tongue whenever it offers to utter a word of discontent, or murmuring against his lot, or against the providence of God. And he will undertake all this in the confidence of success ; for though "no man can tame" his tongue, yet the grace of God can tame it, and that grace is freely offered to every one that needs it.

XI.

CHRISTIANITY THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

"The Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising." — ISAIAH lx. 3.

THERE must have been among the primitive Christians a pious curiosity to know the incidents which marked the early years of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The story of His infancy and childhood would be almost as eagerly read as that of His manhood, and the Church would bend over His cradle as devoutly and reverently as she would bow before His cross. There must have been, too, at hand the materials out of which such a story could be written; for the Blessed Virgin would treasure up, with more than wonted maternal care, every incident of those wondrous early years, and it would be strange, indeed, if she did not share so precious a treasure with the women of her acquaintance who were such devoted disciples of her Divine Son. And yet there is no "Gospel of the Infancy" among the sacred writings of the Christian Church. That apocryphal Gospel which bears

the name is so manifestly spurious, and so utterly puerile in style and scope and conception, that it is unnecessary even to refer to it. The sacred writers pass by with what we must call super-human silence, the whole period of the infancy and childhood. Nay more, thirty out of the three and thirty years of that divine-human life are entirely omitted by two of the four evangelists, and by the other two are so lightly touched that their silence is only brought out thereby in stronger relief. Thus, where the writer of fiction would have been most diffuse, they are almost utterly silent. Where a mythical story would have been rich and full, this gospel story is scant even to poverty. Where a poet or a painter would have given a rich and carefully elaborated picture, these evangelists have been withheld from giving more than the meagerest outline.

The most notable exception to this rule of silence is found in the story of the visit of the Magi to the infant Christ, which derives peculiar interest and importance from the very circumstance of its exceptional character. It is, by the way, no inconsiderable proof of the inner harmony of the Gospel narratives, that this visit of the Gentile sages should have been recorded by St. Matthew, who wrote from an avowedly Jewish stand-point, and whose gospel is so saturated with

Jewish ideas ; while the story of the Jewish shepherds, the first to whom the glad tidings of the Messiah's birth was communicated, is told by St. Luke, whose gospel was written primarily for Gentile readers. This might serve to remind the Gentile Christian, that salvation was of the Jews. That might keep before the mind of the Jewish convert the truth that the Christ was sent with a salvation which was meant, not for the Jew only, but also for the Gentile. The story indeed is profoundly interesting, and in many points of view very instructive and suggestive ; and the event which it records has been held by the Christian Church of such high import, that it has been commemorated along with the nativity and the circumcision, and the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension. For this purpose the feast of the Epiphany was instituted ; and it is given in our church system a prominence which is very striking, but which is not, I fear, generally recognized. Not only have we the feast of the Epiphany, but the Epiphany season, of varying length, sometimes of six weeks' duration—as long as the Lenten season itself ; and the idea of the season is as strongly emphasized and as vividly portrayed in the several Epistles and Gospels as that of any other season of the Christian year.

What is that idea ? It is, as every child in our

Sunday schools knows, or should know, the manifestation of Christ, the outshining of His glory upon men. It has been from the earliest times associated with a cycle of events, each of which presents a phase of the same idea. The baptism of Christ, when the Divine Sonship was manifested by the voice from heaven and the descent of the Holy Ghost ; the miracle at Cana, when Jesus manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him ; the feeding of the five thousand, when again His miraculous power was manifested to men, — all these events have been associated with the Epiphany. But that which unquestionably stands in the foremost place, in association with this season, is the visit of the Magi, whose coming realized that ancient prophecy, "The Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising." Accordingly, we find this phase of the idea occupying the most prominent place in the service for the feast of the Epiphany. That is, in fact, the definition given by the prayer-book. "The Epiphany, or manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles," and collect, epistle, and gospel, develop and emphasize the same aspect of the subject. It is to this phase of the idea of the Epiphany that I shall confine myself this morning.

Now the question at once arises, why give such

prominence to this idea in the church year? Why should the Christian Church in this age of the world celebrate a festival in commemoration of the visit of those Eastern Magi to the infant Christ? And if it be replied that it is not that event, but that which it involved, viz., the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, which we commemorate, then the further question arises, can Christians in this day celebrate Christ's Epiphany to the Gentiles with any real sense of joy?

I. We find a sufficient answer to these questions in the consideration that the Epiphany exhibits Christianity in its sublimest aspect, as the religion of humanity. In the spectacle of those Eastern sages bending the knee in adoration, and offering gold and frankincense and myrrh to the infant Christ, we have a most impressive demonstration of the universality of the Christian religion. Here already by the manger, it becomes evident that Jesus of Nazareth is to attract the wise and learned as well as the simple and unlettered, men of intellect and culture as well as shepherds and ploughmen. He is to be a Saviour for all sorts and conditions of men, and for all ranks of society, and for all classes of minds. Here also, or ever the Son of God is born into the world, is given evidence and assurance of the Father's gracious purpose to break down the bar-

riers between race and race, and bring in a religion which shall know no distinction between Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, bond and free. Thirty-three years after this, the apostle Peter had to learn, by a vision, that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles also, and that the Gentiles might be made partakers of the grace of Christ. Yet all that had been clearly foreshadowed, when, by the leading of a star, God had guided these Gentile magnates to the infant Saviour's feet. Scarcely in this age has the Christian Church learned that even in a pagan darkness, men may feel after God, and find Him; and yet, here in Bethlehem, the disciples of an alien and very erroneous creed, possibly that of Zoroaster, had been accepted in their worship and their offerings by Him who came that He might draw all men unto Him. It is the Epiphany of such a grand and sublime idea as this—a religion as universal as man—meant for mankind, and meet for mankind, sweeping away all walls of separation between race and race, and bringing all peoples and tongues together on the same common ground of salvation—it is this which our Feast of Epiphany commemorates; and if “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” when the foundations of this material universe were laid, surely the sons of men may

with even greater reason celebrate the event which laid the foundation of such a kingdom as this.

Let us remember that Christianity is in this respect profoundly original. It had no predecessor, and it has had no true successor in the presentation of this idea. For us who have never known any other conception of religion except to reject it as false and inadequate, it is impossible to realize that such a notion was new and strange, and full of difficulty to the minds of men who had been educated under the narrow systems, whether of Judaism or of paganism. "Everywhere before Jesus Christ," says Guizot in his "Essence of the Christian Religion," "religions were national, local, establishing between peoples, classes, individuals, enormous distances and inequalities. . . . In the universality of the religious faith (of the Christian religion) and in the independence of the religious society, I am constrained to recognize sublime novelties, — rays of light divine."

"The plans and labors of statesmen," says Channing, "sink into the sports of children when compared with the work which Jesus announced. The idea of changing the moral aspect of the whole earth, of recovering all nations to the pure and inward worship of the one God, and to a spirit of divine and fraternal love, was one of which we meet not a trace in philosopher or legislator be-

fore Him. The human mind had given no promise of this extent of view. We witness a vastness of purpose, a grandeur of thought and feeling so original, so superior to the workings of all other minds, that nothing but our familiarity can prevent our contemplation of it with wonder and profound awe."

"Look at it for a moment," says Liddon. "Here is, as it seems, a Galilean peasant, surrounded by a few followers, taken, like Himself, from the lowest orders of society; yet He deliberately proposes to rule all human thought, to make Himself the centre of all human affections, to be the law-giver of humanity, the object of man's adoration. He founds a spiritual society, the thought and heart and activity of which are to converge upon His person; and He tells His followers that this society which He is forming is the real explanation of the highest visions of seers and prophets, that it will embrace all races, and extend throughout all time. . . . There was to be a universal religion, and He would found it. A universal religion was just as foreign an idea to heathenism as to Judaism. Heathenism held that the state was the highest form of social life: religious life, like family life, was deemed subordinate to political interests. . . . A century and a half after the incarnation, in his attack upon the Church, Celsus ridicules the

idea of a universal religion as a manifest folly ; yet Jesus Christ has staked His whole claim to respect and confidence upon announcing it. . . . 'Go,' He says to His apostles, 'make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' He founds a world-wide religion, and He promises to be the present invigorating force of that religion to the end of time " ¹

It was this grand and original conception, so new to the world then, and so hard to believe, but which has now penetrated Christendom so thoroughly that men have forgotten that they owe it to Christ — this it was which was really involved in the first great Epiphany, when the "Gentiles came to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising." When, therefore, it is asked, what personal or real interest can we, in this far Western land, in this late age of the world, take in the "manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles eighteen hundred years ago," I answer, the same which a nation of freemen takes in the celebration of the anniversary of the day, though centuries intervene, on which their liberty was achieved. Nay, by as

¹ Bampton Lectures of 1866, p. 117.

much as we are profoundly and vitally interested in the knowledge that Christ is the Saviour of all men, without distinction of race or station, by so much are we interested in that first Epiphany of the story of the new-born Christ to those Gentile sages, by so much is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles a truth which most closely and dearly concerns us.

II. But now, what of the realization of that grand idea of a universal religion? Has it been realized? Or has it remained a beautiful vision in the air, too sublime, too ethereal ever to walk the earth in flesh and blood?

The answer is twofold. Yes and no. "No," for the conquests of Christianity are yet incomplete; mankind is not yet as a whole brought into contact with this idea; the nations of the earth are not yet penetrated with the knowledge of this gospel of humanity; the kingdom of God is as yet only partially established. Some may think that this "no" is really so sweeping that there is no room for "yes." But it is not so. In a high and glorious sense, it may be affirmed that this idea has been realized. Time and history have justified it as a true idea. It has come down to earth. Like Him who is the author of it, it has been "made flesh, and dwelt among us."

It has had an individual realization. Wherever,

since the proclamation of the gospel, a human heart has opened to the influences of the Christ, and entered into sympathy with His great plan of a universal society, a world-wide kingdom, there the idea of Christianity has been incarnated and justified. For when all walls of sectarian narrowness, national jealousy, social prejudice, are thrown down, and the currents of human sympathy are allowed to flow in freely and without obstruction from all quarters, just because they are human; when the sovereign and redeeming grace of the "strong Son of God" are loyally and lovingly accepted, and not only the vicious tendencies but the selfishness of human nature is exorcised; and when the soul thus regenerated makes the plan and the idea of Christ its own, and opens itself to the influences of a world-embracing charity,—then surely the conception of a religion of humanity becomes an actuality, and Christ's grand idea is realized. But it has also been realized in part, at least, collectively as well as individually. That prophetic scene at Bethlehem, when the three great men from the Orient bent in lowly adoration before the infant Christ, has again and again been repeated in the ages that have since elapsed. "The Gentiles have come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising." That first Epiphany of the Messiah to the representa-

tives of a Gentile race and an alien creed was only the first of a circling series of Epiphanies by which the nations of the earth and their kings and rulers have seen the light and rejoiced in the redeeming grace of the Christ of God.

Did not the Star of Bethlehem presently shine upon Ephesus and Alexandria and Athens and Rome? Did not its light beam forth in all directions, till it was seen in every part of the Roman Empire? Did not the monarchs of that empire soon come on bended knee to worship at the feet of the Babe of Bethlehem? Did not the religion of Jesus gradually supersede all other religions and systems of philosophy — not by the power of the sword, but by its own inherent, silent might — even, as of old, the image of Dagon fell before the Ark of God? Time fails me to follow the spreading of the light of that Star of Bethlehem. Suffice it that we remember that the nations of Christendom to-day, which are the rulers of the world, and whose ideas and civilization are rapidly becoming universally dominant among men, are Gentile nations, to whom the Christ has been manifested.

Yes, my brethren, the religion of the Nazarene carpenter has demonstrated its truth and its power on myriads of battle-fields in every part of the world. The vigorous Roman, the polished Greek, the rude barbarians of the North, before whose

fierce assault the Roman empire fell, — all have bowed to its sway. And in our day, in this century, we have seen it proving its might in new and untried fields, among the savages of Polynesia and Madagascar and Africa and North America; among the strong and ancient civilizations of China and Japan; among the intellectual and cultured races of India. And everywhere it shows itself equal to the needs of the human heart, able to satisfy the human reason, able to give peace to the human conscience. Thus, by its universal adaptability to the varying needs and circumstances of men, without distinction of age or race or temperament or mental development, Christianity has magnificently demonstrated the truth and vitality of its idea, has completely vindicated its claim to be the religion of humanity. It has not, indeed, become the religion of the whole human race. But it has so far been tested among the diverse peoples and tribes of mankind, that it may safely be said, with strictest regard to scientific accuracy, that it is fit to be the religion of the whole human race. In this respect, it stands alone. No other system, religious or philosophical, can claim to be universal in its power of adaptation. Indeed, no other reformer, philosopher, or founder of a religion, ever put forth such a claim. The Jewish carpenter, alone among men, under-

takes to found a world-embracing kingdom of human hearts — a plan and an enterprise beside which the ambitious schemes of Alexander or Cæsar or Napoleon sink into utter insignificance. He undertakes it — and He succeeds ! His kingdom spreads. Through the darkness comes the cry, “ Watchman, what of the night ? Watchman, what of the night ? ” And he who widely and wisely scans the horizon, makes answer cheerily, “ The morning cometh. ” Yes, the light breaks on many a dark shore, and on many a habitation of superstition and cruelty. The Star of Bethlehem rises higher. Ages are its own ; its course cannot be predicted by our astronomers ; but it is moving upward, its light is spreading far and wide, and the reddening sky gives promise of the coming day. The Gentiles still come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising.

Brethren, our hearts should swell with gratitude to God, that we have been made partakers of the benefits of that Epiphany. Fitly does the epistle for this day utter in our ears the constraining appeal of St. Paul, “ I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. ” Let our hearts respond to that appeal by a renewed and cheerful consecration of ourselves and all that we have to His service. And let us remem-

ber that the realization of Christ's idea of a religion of humanity depends, humanly speaking, upon the Church, and upon ourselves as members of the same. It is ours to make Epiphany of the gospel throughout the world. Oh, may our hearts never fail to beat in sympathy with Christ in His grand idea of a universal religion! May we never take part in the building up of those walls of separation by which many Christians circumscribe their interests, their prayers, their alms! Ah! they do not circumscribe the kingdom of Christ. They only wall up their own hearts, and shut themselves out of the kingdom in a little selfish Utica of their own, and a chill and cheerless Christianity is theirs indeed! But no! Be it ours, my brethren, to throw ourselves with faith and courage and hope into the Redeemer's plan, gladly giving thought and time and prayers and means, that His way may be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations! Amen.

XII.

A PLEA FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

"I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say." — I CORINTHIANS x. 15.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."
— GALATIANS vi. 2.

IT is a striking fact that the Episcopal Church, which until very recently has held more studiously aloof than any other religious body from participation in what is called "temperance work," is to-day the only church in the United States which has organized a "CHURCH TEMPERANCE SOCIETY."

God be praised that our venerable Church, which has always taught her children in her catechism to "keep their bodies in temperance, soberness, and chastity," has perceived the necessity of organizing her influence against the gigantic evil of intemperance !

Our own diocesan, Bishop Henry C. Potter, asks his clergy to call the attention of their parishioners to "the need of united effort by means of the Church Temperance Society and any other tried

and approved agency, to stay the ravages of the great and grievous moral pestilence of intemperance," and adds these solemn words: "If it were cholera or yellow-fever that threatened us to-day, the whole land would be on fire with efforts to arrest it; and yet this dread disease slays its millions for hundreds that perish in other ways."

I need not here discuss the principles of the Church Temperance Society. Enough if I simply restate them:—

1st, That the Church, as the Body of Christ, should deal directly with temperance reform.

2d, That this reform should be distinctly Christian (not merely humanitarian or social or moral) in its principles, and should recognize the grace of God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ as the means supreme above all others by which its ends are to be sought.

3d, That the basis on which its work should be conducted is "union and co-operation on equal terms, for the promotion of temperance, between those who use moderately, and those who entirely abstain from, intoxicating drinks as beverages."

If the Church is true to these principles, she will not stand an idle spectator on the bank while tens of thousands are sinking, to rise no more, beneath the dark tide of intemperance, but will man the life-boat, and hasten to their rescue. Believing it

her duty to represent Christ, and to incarnate Christianity among men ; believing that she is sent to seek and to save that which is lost, and to despair of none, — she will go, with the healing balm of Christ's gospel in her hand, to the help of the myriads who through strong drink are out of the way, wounded by this mortal enemy of the race, and ready to die.

But in all she will firmly hold that *temperance, not total abstinence, is the law of the gospel, universally obligatory*, and that all temperate men are to be welcomed as co-workers on equal terms in the crusade against drunkenness. On this reasonable, broad, and tolerant basis ; without exaggeration, without fanaticism, without digression into side-issues upon which good men must needs differ, without entangling political alliances ; recognizing to the full the awful extent of the evil, — its shame, its crime, its curse, its peril to society, to the family, to the state, — yet refusing to deal with even so tremendous an evil by other than just and tolerant methods, on other than sober and scriptural principles, — this Church Temperance Society asks to-day the sympathy and support of all Christian people.

Entirely convinced of the soundness of these principles, I am, nevertheless, personally a total abstainer ; and while fully and freely according to

every man the right to decide, in the exercise of his Christian liberty, whether or not he will adopt the same rule, I earnestly recommend total abstinence as a measure of safety amid great perils, and as a means of helping forward the reformation so earnestly desired.

Let me first state clearly the position of the Church Temperance Society on this important point. It recognizes and magnifies the place and function of total abstinence, not, indeed, as a master, but as a servant; not as a universal law, but as a valuable rule of expediency in multitudes of cases. Her constitution declares that it is to be "*urged on the intemperate* (a) As a measure of physical necessity, science and experience uniting in the testimony that the drink-craving is kept alive by any indulgence, however small, in that which has been the cause of it.

(b) "As the first step to true repentance.

(c) "As an instrument of reformation."

And the Society "recommends" total abstinence to the temperate in the following cases:—

(a) "Whenever placed in special peril.

(b) "Whenever prudence or medical advice shall require it as a measure of preservation.

(c) "Whenever any, by thus abridging his liberty, may be able to help his weaker brother, or to remove a stumbling-block out of his way.

“And finally (*d*) it is recommended to the young as a safeguard against temptation.”

I shall not travel beyond the limits here marked out in my plea for total abstinence, and I trust I shall throughout “speak as to wise men,” and ask you to “judge what I say.”

1. In the first place, we may clear the ground by observing that the use of alcoholic stimulants, in however mild a form, is, in the case of persons of a fair degree of health, *quite unnecessary*. If, as the testimony given by competent chemists and physiologists tends more and more to render certain, alcohol is never under any circumstances a *food*, but always — like strychnine, like arsenic, like opium — a *poison*; if, as there is the very highest authority for saying, “perfectly good health will always be injured, even by small doses of alcohol;”¹ if the utmost that can be said in its favor is that in the case of some nervous people “who are born into this world to be always ailing, yet never ill,” it seems, when taken in the minutest doses, not to be injurious; if, again, “alcohol has no claim whatever to be considered a supporter of the animal temperature, and no claim whatever to be thought a supporter of muscular power;”² if, again, the experience of navigators and explorers

¹ Dr. Andrew Clark, senior physician to the London Hospital.

² Dr. B. W. Richardson, F.R.S.

and military men has put it absolutely beyond question that the man who has to endure hardship and fatigue amid rigors of extreme cold, or under the burning heats of the tropics, will be incomparably better able to bear them if he has been and is a total abstainer ; and if, finally, the athlete and the boatman and the insurance expert all bear similar testimony, — then, in the name of reason and of science, I claim your acquiescence in the conclusion that the use of alcoholic stimulants is *unnecessary* ; and I claim further that this fact, that it is not necessary (being neither a food, nor a strength-giver, nor a heat-generator), coupled with the additional fact, that, in order to the highest physical endurance, a man *must* be a total abstainer, constitutes a strong presumptive argument in favor of total abstinence as the best rule of living. “I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.”

2. But I urge a more definite and positive ground in favor of abstaining from alcoholic stimulants : the use of them is attended by *peril to health*.

Here the latest testimony of science is, I think, unequivocal. There is the highest scientific authority for saying that alcohol is dangerous to the digestion, dangerous to the blood, dangerous to the tissues, — to the digestion, because it retards the

process of digestion and assimilation ; to the blood, because it impoverishes it, and produces "premature decay and death of the blood-corpuscles ;" to the tissues, because the blood which supplies them with the necessary fluids is by it impoverished, and rendered unable to meet the demands upon it. Now what makes this matter so very serious is that there is no danger-signal by which we may be warned in time to escape these evil effects of alcohol ; but silently, stealthily, insidiously, this agent of corruption and disease and death does its work, unseen of men, in the secret places of the physical organism.

"The men who suffer most from alcohol," says one of the foremost medical authorities of the age,¹ "are the men who are habitually taking a little too much." "The curse of this is that they feel so jolly and comfortable, and full of jokes and fun, that other short-sighted people almost envy them their condition. . . . These are the men who taking a little more than they require, . . . looking well, yea, often feeling well, are yet being sapped and undermined by this excess. Day by day — just as the grass grows, and you cannot see it — day by day this little excess — often a little one — is doing its work. It upsets the stomach, the stomach upsets the other organs, and bit by bit,

¹ Dr. Andrew Clark.

under this fair and genial and jovial outside, the constitution is being sapped; and suddenly, some fine day, this hale, hearty man, whose steps seemed to make the earth resound again, . . . tumbles down in a fit." The same eminent authority stated, that, out of all the patients in the great London Hospital on a certain day, *seven out of every ten* owed their ill-health to alcohol, though perhaps not one of them was what would be called a drunkard; and he adds that more than three-fourths of the disorders in what we call "fashionable life," arise from the use of this very drug.

Again, I say, nature waves no red flag in our faces when we approach the dangerous use of alcohol. The work of degeneration and slow destruction goes on behind a curtain that even science cannot penetrate. And the temperate man is its victim as well as the intemperate.¹

¹ "How often," says a prominent homœopathic authority, "have we, as physicians, been called to treat diseases resulting from the habitual use of alcoholic beverages in patients who considered themselves temperate men or women, and who boasted that they were never under the influence of liquor in their lives, while at the very time they were dying of Bright's disease, disease of the liver, chronic gastritis, brain or spinal disease, fatty degeneration of the heart, chronic bronchitis, with emphysema of the lungs, or even of pulmonary consumption, resulting alone from the long-continued use of some of the many fascinating drinks containing alcohol." (J. W. Dowling, M.D.)

The same authority in answer to the question, What constitutes abuse in the use of alcohol? says, "I most unhesitatingly assert that *habitual use is abuse, even if the quantity be small.*"

Sir Henry Thompson, whose competency as a witness no one will question, had no hesitation in attributing a very large proportion of the most painful and dangerous maladies to the ordinary and daily use of fermented drinks, taken "moderately." Sir William Gull declares that "all alcohol . . . injures the nerve-tissues for the time, . . . and is certainly deleterious to health." And Dr. W. B. Carpenter, the eminent physiologist, warns us that before a man can be justified in saying, as so many do, "the little I take does me no harm," he "ought to be endowed with the gift of prophecy."

Now, in the face of this testimony of the latest medical and physiological science, it becomes a question of serious and momentous significance for every man to answer, whether he is justified in indulging in a luxury so insidiously dangerous. What benefit does this indulgence offer in compensation for so tremendous a risk? Absolutely none. It is not food; it is not strength; it is not a helper, but a hinderer, of work. The man who works with his hands, and the man who works with his brains, will *both* work better, and work longer, and work with less waste of power, if they abstain entirely from alcoholic stimulants. This is indisputable. Am I, then, to purchase the exhilaration of an hour at such a risk? Shall I

give a blank check, to be filled up at the pleasure of King Alcohol, on the resources of my physical manhood, — a draft the full extent of which I can never know until the day of reckoning arrives? Shall I give free passport into my system to an enemy so deadly, — and all for the fleeting pleasures of the wine-cup? Rather will I keep guard against such a foe, and cry with disgraced and ruined Cassio, “O thou invisible spirit of wine! if thou hast no name to be called by, let us call thee Devil!” “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.”

3. But there is a peril deeper and deadlier than the peril to health, — it is the peril of falling under the power of the habit of intemperance.

The Germans have a fable of a rill which babbles as it runs, “Whoever drinks of me will become a wild beast.” No doubt, it would be an exaggeration to apply this fable to the moderate use of intoxicants. But it would be simple truth to say that alcohol is a fountain of which whosoever drinks takes the *risk* of becoming a victim of intemperance. Very insidious and sometimes very slow indeed is the advance of this fatal habit. The tendency is ever to a somewhat increased indulgence. Like a siren, this habit lures men on by its bewitching song, and they follow

a little farther, and again a little farther, — all unconscious that they are steadily sailing into the jaws of death. “Seeing the journey is so deadly a one, ought a man to begin it at all? If he begin, he is in danger of going on; and not one inch of the way is safe, for alcohol has this peculiar property, — it always lures onwards.”¹

My friends, and especially my young friends, we will do well to beware of what has been well called by Archdeacon Farrar “*the seductive sorcery of drink.*” Undoubtedly we have the right to drink in moderation, if we will, and no man has a right to demand total abstinence of us as a test of our loyalty to the cause of temperance reform; but we have another right, — the right to scan carefully the perils and the temptations and the difficulties which surround the moderate drinker. “Wine is a mocker,” said the wise man, and wisely did he say it. No man *intends* or *expects* to yield to its “seductive sorcery.” Not one of the great army of drunkards but would have exclaimed with indignation, had some prophet told him *he* would be a victim of intemperance, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?” But the “mocker” mocked them, and the sorceress beguiled them, and little by little they descended, each one, that slippery path which leads to shame and ruin. It

¹ Rev. Stopford Brooke.

is the old story of the goddess of the enchanted isle, whose magic cup converted all who drank of it into swine. Who shall dare say, *I* am proof against this seductive sorcery? *I* can drink the cup of Circe, and escape its fatal and debasing influence? Has some god from Olympus imparted to thee, as Hermes in the fable did to Ulysses, the secret by which thou shalt certainly escape the magic spell? Grant that some men *do* escape the degrading results of which I speak, — can any man tell *who* shall escape? And will any man deny that every one who approaches her enchanted isle runs the risk of falling under her fatal and degrading influence? And if every man who drinks at all must reckon with this risk of possible alcoholism, is not he the wiser man who refuses to take such a risk, and steers clear away from the isle of Circe, for all it is so enchanting to the eye and to every sense? “I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.”

4. But I hasten to higher ground. So far I have made my appeal for total abstinence on grounds of self-preservation and self-interest, pointing out the risks which every man must run who uses intoxicants at all. Gladly do I now rise to considerations of a very different nature, based not on self-interest, but on humanity, on charity, on that universal brotherhood of men which is Christ's

gift to the world. I appeal to you now, not as *wise* men, but as men of *pity*. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Come down from your high vantage-ground of conscious strength, O my brother! and see these your brethren, your fellow-men, lying helpless in the grip of this monster Drink, fast bound in a bondage more bitter than that of Egypt. Witness their unavailing struggles to be free! See how their manhood grows weaker and weaker, till almost the last spark of it seems quenched! See how their will-power is debauched and drugged, till it lies helpless in the dust! See how all that is noble and generous and brave and true grows weaker and weaker, and all that is sensual and brutal grows stronger, day by day, till Bishop Hall's word is fulfilled to the letter, "Alcohol takes away the man, and leaves the brute." Look at this spectacle of shame and ruin, and ponder long and well its meaning. Reflect that this wreck of human life and hope is only one of a vast multitude of similar wrecks which strew the shore of this fair land of liberty, — lives and homes and hearts wrecked on the treacherous sea of intoxicating drink. Picture also the wretchedness, the poverty, the shame, the agony, of the families of these unhappy victims (they are to be numbered by hundreds of thousands), families whose garments are

garments of woe, and whose daily bread is eaten in sorrow and tears. Draw the picture as vividly and as strongly as the most fervid imagination and the most exuberant diction can; you cannot overdraw it; you cannot by any possibility realize one tithe of the actual horror and suffering and vice and crime which intemperance is causing in this favored land.

And now I ask you as Christian men, can you sit still in presence of such unutterable wretchedness, and stir neither hand nor foot to help? Once this multitudinous wail of human sorrow has entered into your ears, can it be that the love of Christ will not constrain you to spring forward to save, if you may, some of these your perishing brethren? If you indeed know the power of Christ's cross, you will not despair, even of the drunkard. With men his salvation is impossible. With God all things are possible. With this hope and this faith in your heart, you will labor to rescue if it be only *one* of the perishing. But, my brother, when you go to the drunkard to lift him up, and to urge total abstinence on him, will not your argument gain immense force if it is backed by your personal example? Is there here no call to remember the words, "*Bear ye one another's burdens*, and so fulfil the law of Christ"? Is it quite in the spirit of Christ to say, "You to whom

it is so grievous a burden, so tremendous a struggle, to abstain, must make it ; but *I*, to whom it is *no* burden, will not bear it with you"? I speak as to Christian men ; "judge ye what I say."

But my plea is not for those only who have already fallen under the tyrannic sceptre of this King of Death,—for whom we must needs labor under the greatest disadvantages and not seldom with very meagre success,—but for that much larger class, who are not now drunkards, who may not be even occasionally guilty of excess, but who constitute the recruiting-ground for the army of inebriates. I plead for the young men who, in school and in college and in business, are subjected to temptations so plausible, so hard to resist ; whom "Custom," seconded by false shame, bullies into the formation of the habit of taking a drink "now and then,"—first step in that downward slippery path which has led so many of the brightest intellects and noblest natures to ruin. *Facilis descensus averni*,—the descent to hell is by a smooth and easy path ; but, ah ! rough and steep and all but impracticable is the way *back* from the depths of the drunkard's sin.

Hear Charles Lamb's piteous lament : "Oh, if a wish could transport me back to those days of youth, when a draught from the next clear spring could slake any heats which summer suns and

youthful exercise could stir up in the blood, how gladly would I return to thee, pure element, the drink of children and of childlike, holy hermits! In my dreams I can sometimes fancy thy cool refreshment purling over my burning tongue — but my waking stomach rejects it! That which refreshes innocence, only makes me sick and faint. But is there no *middle way* betwixt total abstinence and the excess which kills you? . . . With pain I must utter the dreadful truth that there is *none, none!*”

To such a complexion, alas! thousands of the youth of our land, now pure and innocent, will ultimately come, — cajoled by the “seductive sorcery of drink.” I plead for them. And I plead also for the laboring-man, who is exposed to even greater temptations, confronted by even greater perils. See him going forth in the early morning to his daily toil. His way is planted thick with those nets of Satan, the rum-shops, night and day driving their horrid traffic, — traffic in human lives and in the homes and happiness of men! He returns in the evening past the same dens of ruin, on every corner of the street. Thus the sons of toil must run the gantlet of temptation every time they walk the streets. Ah, my brothers! pause and think of these your fellows in the battle of life. Bear their burdens on your heart a little

while. It is no temptation to *you* to leave your comfortable fireside for the gin-palace, but remember that for the workingman the attractions of the gin-palace are great. There are brightness and warmth and cheerfulness and boon companions and games and pictures — none of which perhaps he has in his crowded room in the tenement-house. He listens to the siren song. He enters the rum-shop. The rest need not be told. The tale of woe and of poverty and of shame and of crime is too long, is too harrowing, is too awful to tell. But this I will say, deliberately, and weighing my words as I speak, — these ten thousand rum-shops among us are eating like a cancer into the manhood and the virtue and the happiness of the toiling masses of our population. They are the mightiest allies of vice, and the most formidable enemies to virtue. They are the hotbeds of crime and of all manner of wickedness. And they constitute a serious menace to the liberties of the people.

What now, my brothers? Is all this nothing to you and me? Shall we wrap ourselves in the mantle of our selfish security (if we *are* secure), and let our neighbors look out for themselves? Shall we sip our sherry after dinner in quiet unconcern? Or shall we rise up and say, “I am my brother’s keeper. His woe is my woe. His dan-

ger is my danger. I am a Christian, and nothing that pertains to the happiness or the welfare of man is foreign to me. If I would fulfil the law of Christ, I must bear my neighbor's burdens as well as my own. I must ask myself, 'What can I do to help and to save the tempted?'"

To ask this question in the sight of God, honestly and with an earnest purpose, is a great point gained for the cause of Reform: it must mean an answer which, in *some* way, will send us forth to labor in this holy cause.

Let me ask you to consider whether we have not here a case which calls for that noble self-abnegation which St. Paul exemplified when he wrote, "If meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore, that I make not my brother to stumble." A man *might* claim that meat was necessary to his bodily vigor, but he can make no such claim as regards the use of alcoholic drinks. Surely, when we consider the wide-reaching and mighty influence of EXAMPLE, we may well seriously question if we have done the whole work of love for our fellow-men, until we put it beyond possibility that *our* indulgence should be the occasion of stumbling to any one. The man of medical and physiological science, though not himself a total abstainer, exclaims, "I wish that all the rising generation would be total abstain-

ers,"¹ — and why? Because the perils of drink are so tremendous, and the abuse of all forms of alcoholic stimulant so great and grievous, that, as a patriot, he could not but wish to see the youth of the country far removed from the fatal temptation. Is it not true that the contagious influence of *example* would go far to bring about a consummation so devoutly to be wished? And is it not also true that every man added to the army of abstainers is another weight in the scale in favor of a universal perception of the danger and the curse which lie, for so many, in the intoxicating cup?

I have spoken of it as a self-abnegation. But let me not be misunderstood. For myself I do not regard total abstinence as a loss, but as a gain; or, if there be occasions when it *seems* to be an act of self-denial, it is so *small* as not to be considered for a moment beside the possibility of thereby helping to strengthen a brother-man who is struggling against temptation, or to raise up one who has fallen under its power. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

Still, I close with another utterance of the great apostle of the Gentiles, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" and if he be not persuaded by the terrible exigencies of the situation

¹ Dr. Andrew Clark.

to adopt the rule of total abstinence either for his own sake, or for the sake of others, at least let him ask God to nerve his arm to strike a vigorous blow in *some* way for the cause of Temperance Reform.

XIII.

CHRISTIANS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." — MATTHEW V. 14-16.

IT is scarcely necessary to say that these are the words of our blessed Lord, and that they form part of the famous "Sermon on the Mount," with which He began His ministry on earth. Obviously they state an important fact as to the import of Christian discipleship: "Ye are the light of the world." They also inculcate a momentous duty growing directly out of that fact: "Let your light shine."

It shall be my endeavor this evening to explain this statement, and to enforce this duty.

I. There are two reasons why explanation is needed. The first is, that the function which is here attributed to the disciples of Christ, is elsewhere in the Scriptures declared to belong exclusively to Christ Himself. Thus, before His birth,

old Zacharias, "filled with the Holy Ghost," prophesied that He should visit the world as "The Day-spring from on high." St. Peter salutes Him as "The Day-star" of mankind. St. John calls Him "The true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And He Himself while yet on earth cried and said, "I am the Light of the world."

How, then, and in what sense, can it be said that Christ's *disciples* are "the light of the world"?

The last of the prophets of the old dispensation supplies the key to our Lord's meaning. Standing on his watch-tower, and scanning the horizon of the future with prophetic eye, Malachi saluted the coming Messiah as "the Sun of Righteousness," who should arise upon a weary and sin-stricken world, "with healing in His wings." This, I say, explains our Lord's words. He is the "Sun," the original source and fount of light. His disciples are the luminaries, deriving their light from Him, shining with His reflected light, as the moon and the planets, which are really opaque bodies, having no light in themselves, derive all their brilliancy from the reflected light of the sun. ¹ It remains

¹ This is vividly brought out by our Lord when He says of John Baptist, — not as our Authorized Version has it, "He was a burning and shining light," but, — "He was the *lamp* that *is kindled* and (so) shineth" (John v. 35); and by the evangelist in affirming, "He was not THE LIGHT" (i. 8).

true, however, that though their light all comes from that gracious Lord who is "the Sun of Righteousness," yet the disciples of Christ are "the light of the world." They are illumined by Christ, for that very purpose that they may be the light of the world.

But — and this is the second reason why the statement of the text needs explanation — some one may say, Are we to suppose that our Lord meant these words to apply to *all* His disciples? Were they not addressed to His twelve apostles? and would it not be presumption to ascribe such an office to any others? Or if we may think them applicable to certain great and distinguished teachers since the apostles, or possibly even to the ordained ministers of the Church, yet surely not to private Christians — to Christians in general?

I answer, undoubtedly they were meant to apply, not to the apostles only, not to certain great teachers only, not to the ordained ministry only, but to private Christians, to all Christians, men and women and children. For the context shows that our Lord was speaking to His disciples in general, not to the apostles alone, when He said, "Ye are the light of the world." Elsewhere, too, He describes the subjects of the Gospel Kingdom under the term "Children of Light;" and St.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord ; walk as children of the light." He exhorts the Romans to "put on the armor of light ;" and he bids the Philippians remember that they were to "shine as lights" in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

It is, then, no decoration of rank, or title of honor, conferred upon certain distinguished and eminent servants of the Great King — a kind of spiritual Legion of Honor ; nor is it an official designation of the Ministers of the New Dispensation ; but a title and designation belonging to all disciples of Christ without distinction. And how lofty a title it is ! Christ compares the influence of His disciples to *Light*, the mightiest and the most beneficent potency in Nature ! Remember that all the beauty of the green earth, all the grandeur of the great and wide sea, and all the matchless glory of the sky, are wrought by the subtile and exquisite agency of Light. In the beautiful language of a late distinguished writer, "The sun's rays are his ministering angels, sent forth to minister to all things on earth. By their ministry it is that the waters of the great deep are spread in vapor through the air, that the secret fountains of the dew and rain are replenished, and that the dry land is gladdened with springs and rivers. As

from the water of the ocean they fertilize the earth, and cool the hot air, so from the elements of the crude and formless air itself they rear the living plant. The vegetable kingdom of the globe, with all its countless forms and orders, is the more than magical result of their beneficent care. They build the giant oak over our heads, and weave the sweet violet at our feet. The forests of a thousand years, no less the flowers of a day, are the work of their delicate fingers. The endless variety of rich grains also, and all the delicious fruits of every clime, are but so many transmutations of the invisible air, wrought and matured by these busy alchemists of the sun, by these shining ministers of material good, who, under God, fill all the earth with food and gladness."

Such a ministry, in the moral world, is that which the words of Jesus in our text attribute to His disciples, when He says, "*Ye are the light of the world.*" They are to go forth as rays from the Sun of Righteousness into all the earth, to illumine its ignorance, to dispel its darkness. By their ministry the dew and the rain of heavenly blessing are to be distilled upon the parched and thirsty hearts of men. By their God-given influence the desert of sin and sorrow is to be made to rejoice and blossom as the rose, and a sin-cursed earth is to be filled with the fruits of righteousness and

peace. What an exalted office, then, is that to which the disciples of Christ are appointed! and how grave, how solemn the responsibility attaching to it! Oh, think of the ignorance, the superstition, the misery, the sin, which brood like a dark cloud over mankind in all lands, even in this Christian land, and then consider that the duty of dispelling it is laid upon the disciples of Christ! And you and I, my brethren, are disciples of Christ. The privilege and the responsibility of this blessed ministry for men are ours.

II. This brings me, secondly, to THE DUTY inculcated here by the Lord, — “*Let your light shine.*” When men light a lamp, they do not put it under the bushel-measure, but on the lamp-stand, that it may shine upon all that are in the house. “So,” says our Lord, “let your light shine before men.”¹ The possession of light implies the duty to let it shine for the benefit of the world. Shakspeare felt this when he wrote, —

“Heaven does with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, ’twere all alike
As if we had them not.”

¹ The sense is somewhat obscured in our Version, first by rendering the same Greek word by two different English words, and secondly by misunderstanding and transposing the “So.” The passage should be rendered, “Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel-measure, but upon the lamp-stand, and it shineth upon all that are in the house. Even so let *your* light shine before men, in order that,” etc.

But more. I venture to think we ought to put an emphasis on the pronoun, and say, "Let *your* light shine before men," and to draw from this the inference that every disciple has a light which is peculiarly his own, committed to him to hold forth, which if he does not hold forth, there is just that much taken away from the sum-total of heavenly light in the world. Each one of the countless millions of rays of the sun has its ministry to perform ; and each one of the millions of Christ's disciples has likewise his ministry and his work in the illumination and benediction of mankind. All are not "burning and shining lights," as was John the Baptist ; yet all have *some* light, if it be only a single ray, which they have received from the Sun of Righteousness. Oh, how sacred is that light which Christ has given to each of us for the good of the world ! Even a single star, seen through a rift in the storm-cloud, may guide the wrecked mariner safe into port. Even a rush-light in the window of some lowly hut on the far Western prairie may save the traveller who has lost his way in the storm, and is ready to perish. Even a glow-worm's light, gleaming out for an instant, and then expiring, may reveal the deadly serpent coiled up in the path before you. And so the weakest and the humblest Christian may be a blessing to his fellow-men. — You have heard

of that poor widow of Iona, "whose cottage stood on an elevated ridge of a rugged and perilous coast, and whose heart was melted by sight of wrecked vessels and the wail of perishing human beings. She thought, might not her lamp, if placed by her window, prove a beacon-light to keep some mariner off the coast? All her life after, her lamp burned at her window during the winter nights, and the blessing of many a fisherman came upon her who thus did what she could." She was infirm and poor, but every day she toiled at her spinning-wheel, and with the fruits of her labor kept her lamp supplied; and all night the light shone out from her cottage on the dark waters, giving warning to many a poor sailor who else might have perished on the rocks. *She let her light shine before men.* And it was the love, and the labor, and the self-sacrifice, of her act which gave it a fragrance and a potency in the moral as well as the natural world. Go, brother, and do thou likewise. With such a spirit as animated the widow of Iona, *you* may send forth a light by your example, by your prayers, by your labors, which may warn and save some of your fellow-men from making shipwreck of their souls.

Again, therefore, I say, the duty enjoined in the text is binding on every disciple of Christ, without any exception whatever. Each is responsible for

letting his light shine, whether it be the light of a taper or of a star. Each has his share in the great work of dispelling the darkness of the world.

But now comes the question, What is this light that we must let shine? I answer, nothing which is natural to us, or inherent in us; not our personal gifts or qualities. It is derived: it comes from above, from Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. To think otherwise would be to repeat the error of the ancients, who supposed that light was a substance emitted by the eye. Milton regarded it as something from above this world, exclaiming in his famous apostrophe, —

“Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav’n firstborn,
Or of th’ Eternal co-eternal beam,
May I express thee unblam’d? since God is Light.”

Modern science has taught us that it is indeed the “offspring of Heaven,” that it comes down from above, from the great central source, the Sun himself. In all this, Nature is a parable of grace. Light in the moral world, in the spiritual sphere, is not of earth: it cometh down from above, from “the Father of Lights,” whose image Christ is. It follows that the light we must let shine before men is Christ’s light reflected by us. If our faces are to shine, it must be because we have been on the mount with Moses and Elias, and have beheld

His glory. So shall men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. So shall Christ shine through us upon the darkness of the world. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." "He hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

Here, however, we are met by an objection. Some man says, "I cannot speak about religion to my neighbors; I have not the gifts to engage in evangelistic or missionary labors; I cannot find any church-work that I can do." Ah, it is not this which is so much needed, as the influence of a consistent and godly example at home and abroad. Our Lord's comparison is suggestive of silent influence. Light is, as I have said, the mightiest potency in Nature. The power of the tornado, or the volcano, or the earthquake, which we employ as the symbols of mightiness, is as nothing compared with that of light. Those stupendous phenomena are themselves subject to solar influence. And yet light works silently, noiselessly, unostentatiously. Thus pervasive and mighty is the influence of *character* in the world. It is not the man of words, or of much speaking

about religion, or of eloquent tongue in discoursing upon its advantages, who wields the greatest influence for God ; nor is it even the man of energetic action in the various lines of religious activity and church life. Doubtless these are valuable and useful ; though often, if analyzed, it would be found that, after deducting the bigotry, and the pride of denomination, and the love of praise, and the ambition, which are constituent elements in many such, the percentage of genuine zeal and true religion remaining would be very small indeed. But the man who wields the mightiest influence is he who though slow of speech, and diffident in action, is godly in his life, and Christlike in his temper. The light of such a man burns with a steady flame. It shines out before men. It cannot be hid. "It is no task for suns to shine." So with such a man. "Is so and so a Christian?" asked one of George Whitefield. "How should I know?" was the reply : "I never lived with him." — "I have been in his family," said Christian to Faithful, speaking of Mr. Talkative, "and have observed him at home and abroad ; and I know what I say of him is the truth. His house is as empty of religion as the white of an egg is of savor." On the other hand, Lord Peterborough said of Fénelon, "If I stay in his house any longer, I shall become a Christian in spite of myself."

So potent is the influence of a consistent Christian example.

And now a few words as to the performance of this duty. Note these three things: 1st, If we would let our light shine before men, we must endeavor to forget ourselves, and to watch against all forms of self-seeking in the work of Christ. What we have to do is to reflect Christ's light; to let Christ shine through us upon the world. Now, you know that the most perfect reflectors are those which make you almost unconscious of their presence. "If the polish of the mirror were perfect," says Mr. Tyndall, "it would be invisible: we should simply see in it the images of other objects." So those reflect most of the light of Christ upon their fellow-men who keep themselves and their personal gifts and attainments as much out of view as possible. If a man could be without spot, he and his personality would be lost sight of by men, who would simply see in him the image of Christ. No one so utterly disobeys this precept of Christ as he who, under pretence of letting his light shine before men, parades his talents or his attainments, or in any wise obtrudes himself upon the attention of his fellow-men. There is no such thing in nature as perfect transparency. The purest crystal quenches *some* rays of light. So with character. There is no man who perfectly

reflects or transmits the light of Christ: the best and purest men quench *some* of the light of Christ. But he is the most useful and the most perfect Christian who lets Christ shine through him with the least admixture of self.

2d, If we would let our light shine, we must form good habits, and adhere to them: we must adopt fixed principles of conduct, and stand to them at any cost. In how many ways might this be illustrated by the varied forms of human life in this great metropolis! What opportunities men of business have of illuminating the darkness of many phases of commercial life, by adopting the strictest principles of integrity, and adhering to them at any sacrifice! And what a mighty influence might Christian men wield for good, if every professing Christian would stand fixed and immovable in his standard of uprightness, ready to go down as brave Herndon did with his ship, rather than surrender to the pleas of expediency, or the love of gain!

3d, This duty involves self-denial and the cross. Letting his light shine before men meant stoning and death for St. Stephen. It meant the arena and the wild beasts for the Christians of the first three centuries. It meant the rack, and the dungeon, and the stake, for hundreds at the Reformation. Those holy men, Ridley and Latimer, and

he, too, whose hand was chiefly concerned in our Book of Common Prayer, Cranmer, let *their* light shine in the flames at Martyr's Cross at Oxford. In some way, and in some degree, this has always been true, and is true to-day; and I say frankly to every one who would let his light shine, — understand that you cannot do it faithfully without self-denial and the cross.

Such is the significance of the words of our Lord in the text, and such the nature of the duty which they involve. My friends and brethren in the Lord, consider, I pray you, their personal application. Again I say, they are addressed to every disciple of Christ, whatever his station, talents, circumstances. You who sit here this afternoon, in this sacred place, every one of you who is by profession a Christian, to you the Saviour and Teacher of men says, "*Ye, ye*, are the light of the world." Fathers and mothers, "*ye* are the light of" your families. Are you letting your light shine before your children and your domestics, by example as well as by precept? by maintaining your parental authority with both firmness and gentleness? Young men and young women, "*ye* are the light of the" society in which you move. Are you letting your light shine before your fellows? Do your irreligious companions take knowledge of you that you have been with

Jesus? or do you give them reason to conclude that there is, after all, no appreciable difference between a worldling and a Christian? Business men, and especially you that are influential in business circles, "ye are the light of the" commercial "world." Are you letting your light shine before men? Do you resist the temptations of commercial life? Do you let men see that you have learned your standard of commercial integrity in the school of Christ? Natural philosophers tell us that there are two classes of bodies, — the transparent, or those which permit light to pass freely through them; and the opaque, which rapidly quench the light that enters them. I think there is just such a distinction between Christians. We have transparent Christians, who freely and gladly transmit the holy light they have received to their fellow-men; and opaque Christians, whose light, if it shines at all, shines very dimly, because they seem to quench the light they receive, as though it were given them for their own sake alone. I fear the opaque Christians vastly preponderate in most of our churches. Nay, I fear there are many whose spiritual opacity is so nearly absolute that they transmit no light at all, and who must feel it a cruel irony to say to *them*, "Ye are the light of the world."

My Christian brethren, you have engaged to be

servants and soldiers of Jesus Christ ; beware how you turn a deaf ear to His commands ! You have, with your own mouth and consent, openly before the Church, confessed yourselves His disciples ; beware, I conjure you, of the danger of dishonoring that holy name wherewith ye are called ! Have a care lest you forfeit your privileges, and prove unworthy of your high calling ! Followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world ! to you I appeal for compassion on behalf of the thousands of your fellow-men still living in darkness and unbelief. Representatives of the religion of Divine Love ! look in pity on the multitudes all around you in this great city who are without God and without hope in the world. To you the ascended Christ has committed the duty of enlightening all this darkness. Dare you repudiate the responsibility, and, Cain-like, say, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

A visitor once suggested to the watchman at the Calais lighthouse the possibility of one of his lights going out. "Never, sir !" was the reply. "Why, yonder, where nothing can be seen, there are ships going by to every part of the world. If to-night one of my burners went out, within six months would come a letter from India, or from Africa, or from America, saying that on such a night, at such an hour, at such a minute, the light

burned dim, the watchman neglected his post, and vessels were put in jeopardy on the high seas. Ah, sir! sometimes in the dark nights and in stormy weather I look out upon the sea, *and feel as if the eye of the whole world was looking at my light.*" Oh for such a sense of responsibility as that! Oh that you and I, my brethren, might feel that if we neglect our duty, and suffer our light to burn dim, we are putting in peril the characters of our fellow-men! Oh that we could realize — I will not say that the eye of the whole world is upon us, but that the eye of our Lord Jesus Christ is upon us, to see whether or not we are letting our light shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father in heaven!

XIV.

THE FUNCTION OF PAIN.

"Why is my pain perpetual?" — JEREMIAH xv. 18.

THIS piteous lament of the persecuted prophet may fitly represent the anguished cry which rises to heaven from suffering humanity, from age to age, from generation to generation. Listen, and you shall hear it echoing through the long-drawn aisles of the Past, — a perpetual *miserere*, pouring forth its sad strains into the ear of the Omnipotent. In all lands, under all skies, in all times, the same mournful wail is heard, — a ceaseless dirge of woe, day and night, from ten thousand times ten thousand hearts, struggling with adversity, battling with disease, staggering under the weight of sorrow or suffering. "Why is my pain perpetual?" The question is a natural one: it cannot be repressed; nor can reason condemn, though it may be unable to answer it. Why do these dark shadows perpetually fall across the path of human life? What is the meaning of these sharp and painful experiences? Have they any function in the evo-

lution of life, of character, of history, of the race? And, if so, what is it?

It would almost seem that men had abandoned the attempt to solve these problems; for by common consent, pain and disease, suffering and sorrow, are called "mysteries," — "dark and inscrutable mysteries." Now, it is impossible to deny altogether the darkness and the mystery; for cases are common of suffering and of disease in the presence of which we can only bow our heads as before the inscrutable, and say, "I was dumb: I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." But they are not all darkness and incomprehensibility. These "mysteries" are also "masteries" — masterful forces in the education and exaltation of humanity. Have you ever considered what kind of a world this would be if there were no pain here, no sick-beds, no sorrow-stricken homes? Have you ever reflected that these "inscrutable mysteries" are the chosen instrumentalities for fashioning the highest types of character, both in the sufferer himself and in those who minister to his suffering? Have you ever considered how much of the divinest patience and self-sacrifice that have ever mirrored Christ to men, how much of the loftiest heroism and courage that have ever glorified human nature, have been finely fashioned on the anvil of suffering? It is written of the Son

of God, that "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Yea, He was "made perfect through suffering." Even He did not ascend to His glory till He had first descended to the humiliation and the pain of the garden and the cross. And has any child of man ever fully learned the lessons of life except in the school of suffering? Has any human character ever ascended into the region of perfection except by the path which leads down through the valley and the shadow, through Gethsemane and Calvary, up to Olivet?

There are some excellent persons who would persuade us that Christ died to deliver us from pain and disease as well as from sin. But while, if we look to the ultimate result of redemption, this is doubtless true; yet it were a grievous error to forget that what Jesus said to Pilate is true of all our earthly sufferings (sickness and pains as well as sorrows and afflictions), "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above." Pain and disease did, it is true, come into the world as the attendants and servants of sin; but it is pity indeed if we have not learned that the Lord has made them His ministers and His servants, even as He made the thorns and thistles, the labor and the sweat, which resulted from the fall, the means of the development of the faculties and powers of man, the

fountains of progress and civilization. Our Christian hope points to the coming era, when there shall be "no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying;" when "God shall wipe away all tears" from His children's eyes: but *that* will be in the "new heaven" and the "new earth;" that will be in the perfect temple of the living God; that will be among men and women who have passed through the school of suffering, and learned its lessons. *Then* pain and sorrow *may* be abolished, as the scaffolding is removed from the finished building; but to remove them out of the world now, would be to pull down the scaffolding, without which it is impossible to rear the building. The earth was once a stranger to pain, and it will be again; but in the former case sin had not entered, and so perhaps pain was not needed; and in the latter, sin will be abolished because the lesson of pain will have been fully learned. A sinless race may not need this discipline, — we know not, — but certainly a fallen race like ours can only climb back to God and holiness by the ladder of trial and temptation and suffering.

" 'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,
Whose golden rounds are our calamities,
Whereon our feet firm planting,
Nearer God the spirit climbs,
And hath its eyes unsealed."

Let us, then, be sure of this : a world without suffering would be a world without much that is most angelic, most divine. Call it "a huge hospital," if you will, as it now is ; but, if so, it is a hospital in which God's angels are not dimly seen, — charity and self-sacrifice and consecrated skill, — ministering to the sufferers. Yes, and the sufferers themselves are changed. By and by we see the halo of holy patience circling their brows ; something more than submission — acquiescence, cheerful acquiescence in the Father's will. But had there never been pain and suffering, what a different world it would have been ! All marsh and meadow ; all plain and prairie ; no towering cliffs and yawning chasms ; no heaven-kissing Mont Blanc ; no thunderous Niagara ; no valley of the Yosemite — a dead-level world ! Those lofty heights of heroism and patience which now delight the eye in the retrospect of the past, would sink into monotonous stretches of commonplace lives. Those names writ large by the pen of history, and made radiant by the light of self-forgetting devotion, would disappear with the pain or the suffering or the calamity that made them great. The glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the brightest constellations of virtue and of valor, which now illumine the records of

the race, would vanish from the firmament of human experience. Yea, the very form of the Saviour Himself would be seen no longer; for what would be the story of His life, if the fasting and temptation, the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, were eliminated? In the light of such thoughts, the clouds begin to break away: and though we may not dream of solving the mighty mystery of the existence of evil, yet this I think we may dare to say, since God is God, that evil has been made the occasion of larger good; that He who maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, will also make the malice of the Devil to praise Him; and that the poet had right when he sang of

“Greater good because of evil,
Larger mercy through the fall.”

To doubt this would indeed be disloyalty!

We may, therefore, thank God for pain, for suffering, for sorrow. Whichever has been our lot, depend upon it we are, or if not, we ought to be, the better, the wiser, the richer, for it. If we take it patiently, as the good will of our good God, then will it prove a blessing. Then will tribulation be what the word implies it ought to be, — the *tribulum*, the flail by which the harvest of life will be threshed, and the wheat separated from the chaff. Then will pain no longer seem a cruel

infliction; for we shall see that it is the chisel in the hands of the Divine Artist, by which, out of the rough block of our sinful, selfish humanity, the form, not of the Apollo, but of the Christ, will be made to emerge. Then will sorrow be the crucible in the hands of the Divine Master, wherein the dross of the soul will be purged away, and the gold refined.

Such, then, is the function of pain and its kindred evils, sorrow and affliction, in God's economy of life. Surely a noble function, and one which, when we steadily reflect upon it, goes far to take away the strangeness and the mystery of it; to make of it, in fact, a "mystery" in the New-Testament sense of the word; something once hidden, but now revealed,—revealed in the light of the life and the passion of Him who has illumined earth's darkest valleys, even the "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

But let us not make the mistake of supposing that tribulation—this threshing of the soul—in any of its forms *necessarily* produces the results which I have described. These are the peaceable fruits which the gracious Father desires and designs that they should bring forth. These are what they are fitted to produce. But we must remember that the material to be fashioned in this case is a free, self-determining human soul, whose

freedom cannot be violated without destroying its very essential fibre. All our comparisons fail us here. The artist's chisel works upon a block of marble, but the chisel of pain works upon a soul that is free; and with reverence be it said, even the Divine Artist cannot carve an image of Christ out of these souls of ours unless they yield themselves to His will. The goldsmith can purge out the dross, and refine the gold, by simply putting it into his crucible, and keeping it there long enough; but even Christ, the Refiner and Purifier, and Redeemer of the world, cannot purge away the subtle dross of pride and selfishness from our earthly nature by the fire of suffering, if we blindly and obstinately *resist* His Holy Spirit.

The effect, then, of trial and affliction, whether bodily or mental, depends upon the way in which it is received. It may embitter, instead of sweetening, the spirit. It may harden, instead of softening, the heart. And then the gracious purpose of Him who chasteneth not in wrath, but in mercy, will be frustrated and turned aside by the perversity of man. There is no necessary virtue in pain, as such, to refine and purify the soul. If that were so, the ascetic austerities of monasticism and of Buddhism would be justified. But no: it is when sorrow and suffering are accepted as God's will, given by His hand, appointed by His wisdom, that

they become instruments whereby character is chiselled into the image of Christ. It is not for man to inflict pains and losses upon himself, in the expectation of thereby growing pure and holy. That were to take the chisel into his own clumsy hands. No. He must leave it to God, who will appoint the best means of developing the Divine within us. His unerring Providence will send just the measure of chastisement that we need, and just in the way we need it, and just at the time we need it, and just as long as we need it. This is the hard, hard lesson of faith, — to trust steadfastly at all seasons and under all circumstances in the wise providence of God, and never to doubt either His care or His love.

To strengthen our faith, then, let us recall some of the utterances of those holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, — passages in which the causal connection between suffering and holiness is distinctly stated. Saith the wise man, "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts." Saith the afflicted patriarch, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Saith the prophet in the name of the Lord, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is

tried ; they shall call on My name, and I will hear them : I will say, It is My people ; and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Our Lord said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," and added, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." St. Peter, the foremost of the apostles, writes, "Though now for a season . . . ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," it is that "the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." St. James bids us "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations ; "knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." St. Paul exclaims, "We glory in tribulation," "knowing that tribulation worketh patience ;" and again, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ;" and yet again, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." And that inspired writer who penned the sublime Epistle to the Hebrews, declares with emphasis that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth," giving as the reason,

that chastisement produces "the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Side by side with their words let us place the deeds, the examples, of these holy men of old. One can see in the mirror of their writings, as well as in the record of their lives, that these chosen ones were, like their Divine Master, "made perfect through suffering," or at least that their sufferings and afflictions had led them far up the path whose goal is perfection. Nothing is more characteristic of the New-Testament writers than the subtle power they possess to impress the reader with a conviction of the reality of the experiences they describe. The intensity of their conviction glows and burns on every page. When they assert the purifying effect of suffering, we feel that they are testifying out of the fulness of a personal knowledge. Here is no "cunningly devised fable," no fine-spun theory, no airy speculation, or poet's dream, but the transcript of their own experience. They speak that they do know, and testify that they have seen and felt in their own hearts and lives. When the great apostle, like a mighty warrior, challenges the leagued host of his foes — tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, peril, the sword — to separate him from the love of Christ, we feel, with the certainty of intuition, that he is not an actor playing a part,

but a veritable soldier of the Cross in the midst of the arena of conflict, battling with this confederacy of foes, and coming off "conqueror and more than conqueror" through Him that loved him. That sublime passage describes his own victory over pain and persecution and trial. But not these holy men of old alone. Men and women of our time, too, a noble army, have ascended with Jesus into the holy Mount by the same arduous path, leaving us an example that we should follow their steps. How often have we seen the purifying power of pain and loss, of sorrow and trial! How often have we marked in the life of some patient sufferer the gradual unfolding of the Christlikeness, till at length the crown of thorns has been changed into a mitre of glory, on which we could trace the words, "Perfect through suffering!" Yes, even this age, which we are wont to style an age of unbelief, but which is also, in some directions, an age of triumphant faith, can boast a great company of whom it may be said, —

" They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain :
O God ! to us may grace be given
To follow in their train !"

You may, therefore, strengthen your wavering faith, O sufferer ! in the beneficent purpose of

this, God's strange economy, by lifting your eyes to the great "cloud of witnesses" who have trod the same rough and thorny path. And then from these, whose song of triumph swells upon the ear of faith like the voice of many waters, turn to the spectacle presented by the disciples of cultivated unbelief in all its manifold forms. This boasted Culture, which lifts itself up in proud *soi-disant* superiority to Christianity, what has it to say in the presence of pain, of sorrow, of calamity? It moves, I grant, as with the majesty of a queen, it speaks as with the tongue of an angel, in the lecture-hall and the studio, in the senate and the forum; but, ah, in the sick-room and the hospital, in the chamber of death, and in the house of mourning, its voice is dumb, its hand is powerless! It may take up the parable of the ancient stoics, though in a spirit far less admirable than they, and counsel absolute insensibility to pain and suffering, whether of ourselves or others, as the only passport to perfection. But this is the best it can do: it makes no approach to the conception of the gospel, that tribulation is the God-appointed path to perfect peace and perfect holiness. It not seldom follows the stoic into the philosophy of despair, boldly inculcating with Schopenhauer and Hartmann the wisdom of suicide as a refuge from the hopeless calamities of life; or else, with

other "lights of philosophy," avoiding so shocking a word as self-destruction, it baptizes the same act with a beautiful Greek name, "Euthanasia," and points to this as the reasonable refuge of those unfortunates whose diseases are incurable, or who deem their sufferings unendurable.

Such examples of the impotence of the wisdom which refuses the illumination that descends from above, may well kindle our gratitude for the diviner wisdom which glows like a radiant star upon the brow of Christianity. This knows no such word as "despair." Its God is "the God of Hope." Its evangel sheds light upon the darkest experiences of pain or suffering that ever fell to the lot of man. Its message to the suffering children of God is this:—

Your suffering, whatever its form, whatever its intensity, is not "without your Father." You are in His hands. He does not forget you; He will never leave or forsake you; He only designs "thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine." Look intently, O sufferer! and you will see pain slowly transfigured before your gaze till it takes on the very features of Him of whom the prophet said, "He shall sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver." You are suffering, moreover, it may be, not for your own benefit alone, but for that of others. There is a principle of vicariousness in human suf-

fering. Let me illustrate by a familiar instance. A poor traveller falls ill of fever all alone in the South-American swamps. There he lies for days in a wretched hut, quenching his thirst with the waters of a pool close at hand. At last this pool dries up ; and with extreme difficulty, the sick man crawls to another, half a mile distant. Its water is so bitter he can scarcely drink it ; but he must drink it, or die of thirst. That afternoon he could not think why he felt stronger than for many weeks. The next day he drank more abundantly of the bitter pool ; and still, the more he drank, the stronger he grew, till he was entirely restored ; then he found that a tree had fallen into the water, which gave it its bitterness, and gave it also its power of cure. And this is the way in which one of the most important medicines now in use was discovered, — a medicine which has saved thousands and thousands of lives which must else have perished. Even so hath God appointed that some of us should drink the bitter waters of affliction or of pain, that others may be given spiritual health and salvation. My brother, when you are perplexed by what seems your hard lot, remember the poor traveller in the lonely wilds, and try to so drink your bitter waters, that men, beholding your patience and cheerfulness, may glorify God. Finally, for your consolation and encouragement, remember that you are not

alone in this experience of suffering. The holy apostle counted all things but loss that he might know "the fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings." He felt himself nearest to his Divine Master when he was drinking the bitter cup of suffering. O soldier of Christ! yours is the same strong consolation, — yea, a much stronger one; for if you look up from your own bed of suffering, you will see One close by, a companion in pain, in all points tempted like as you, able, therefore, to be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, who can have compassion on you in each experience, and whose compassions fail not. It is the Man of Sorrows: it is the Captain of your Salvation.

XV.

THE FATHERHOOD AND THE FAMILY.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." — EPHESIANS iii. 14, 15.

THE natural interpretation of this language is, that God's children on earth and in heaven, men and angels and redeemed saints ; the Church militant and the Church triumphant, and the angelic throng, — all constitute one family, owning one Father, and having one home, according to the sentiment of those familiar lines, —

"Angels and living saints and dead,
But one communion make."

Such a representation of the relation of God's children to each other is entirely in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture ; and it is, moreover, a very profitable view to be presented. For it cannot but re-animate the Christian's drooping spirits ; it cannot but strengthen his faith ; it cannot but tend to counteract the overweening influence of earthly things ; it cannot but help to spiritualize his affections, — to dwell upon the

thought that he is not alone in the conflict and the race, but is joined with the great family of God in all ages and in all worlds :—

“ One family we dwell in Him,
One Church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.”

But I am persuaded it is not this truth which the apostle means to express here. The sense was missed by our translators. By common consent of the best scholars, the passage is rendered thus : “ I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

There is a connection between the word for “ father ” and that for “ family ” in the Greek which we cannot reproduce in translation, but which may be illustrated by the analogous connection which exists in English between “ creator ” and “ creature.” Every family (*πατριὰ*) derives its name from the Father (*πατήρ*). Translated thus this passage contains three topics upon which I desire to dwell : the Fatherhood of God,—the fatherhood of man,—and the perpetuity of the family.

I. First, then, I find here a remarkable and most interesting statement of the Fatherhood of

God. It is this: that the prototype of all human fatherhood is found in the Divine. God is the true and perfect Father, of whom all other fathers are but faint likenesses. It is not, then, by way of illustration that God is called "The Father." It is not a word selected in condescension to human weakness, to be in due time superseded by some other, but it is the word which properly describes His relation to His creatures, and for which no substitute can be found, since it expresses a fundamental relation.

The idea of Fatherhood is essential to the nature of God: it cannot be left out. He is truly and literally "the Father" — the "All-Father." No human father fulfils the import of the great name he bears. Let us mark it well: the name and the relation it expresses were not taken from our creature-life, and applied to the Creator, but the reverse is true. As one of the old fathers hath it, "Not from us did it ascend to heaven, but from heaven came down to us." Let me illustrate. Far off beyond the Rocky Mountains, in the valley of the Humboldt River, the traveller sometimes sees, in certain conditions of the atmosphere, some earthly object — even an entire landscape — painted as if by an angel's hand upon the clouds. Not thus is this word "Father" applied to God — an earthly image upon a heavenly ground. Ah,

then, dear as it is to the ear of man, it were no better than a cruel mirage mocking poor travellers through this desert of time! But no: it is a heavenly image reflected in earthly relations; the application of the word "father" to man is borrowed from its divine and heavenly meaning. It is a dewdrop fallen from the skies, which mirrors in its tiny surface the whole "scope of heaven."

But is this conception of the Fatherhood of God peculiar to Christianity? No, not absolutely peculiar: some glimmerings of it, at least, were found in other religions. Thus, the ancient Greeks, while they peopled every grove and stream and mountain with divinities, yet looked up to one who was before and above all these inferior deities; and him they named Zeus, father of gods and men. St. Paul could quote to the Athenians a saying of one of their own poets, "We are also His offspring." The Romans also recognized the same truth in their name for the supreme divinity, — Jupiter, Zeus-Pater. Our Scandinavian ancestors dimly perceived the unity of God: they felt that though all visible things must perish, and so the gods who protected them, yet there was one above them all who could not perish. They perceived, too, that man was not an orphan in the universe — that he had a father in heaven; and so they dreamed of Odin, All-Father, who had his dwelling

in the blue, unchangeable ether. Tiu, they called him, from Tuisco, "heaven;" and they dedicated a day to his honor, — "Tuesday." Man was in their beautiful mythology "the child of Tuisco (Heaven) and Hertha (Earth)."

I say nothing of Judaism, only because it goes without saying, that the idea of this relation was latent in it, that it came sometimes to the surface, especially in the later developments of the religion, in the psalmists and prophets, though never in its fulness, never in its universality.

It remained for Christianity to shed a flood of light on this whole subject. It transformed a guess into a certainty; a dream into reality; a dim and shadowy outline into a clear and definite image. Jesus Christ has come to reveal the Father unto men, and to teach them that He is the Father, not of a race, nor of an elect number, — a kind of spiritual aristocracy, — but of all without distinction. He has taught them, furthermore, to approach Him with filial confidence, sure of a welcome, even when they have wandered farthest. He has showed them that the heart of the Eternal beats in genuine sympathy for His earthly children; and thus it becomes true, as the great Niebuhr said, that the God of the Bible is "heart to heart."

But we must never for a moment forget that

Christ came, not only to reveal to man his filial relation to God, but to reconstitute it on a new basis, even that of His own atonement and mediation. Adam walked in Eden as a "son of God," happy in his knowledge of his sonship; but when he sinned, he felt himself an alien and a stranger, and fled from the face of his Father. Why? Because filial confidence had given place to distrust and shame and fear. Christ came, the second Adam, to undo the work of the first. By His mediation and sacrifice, He restores to man his position as an accepted and beloved son, in whom the Father is well pleased; banishes fear and shame and distrust; gives back the confidence and trustfulness of a dear child; removes the flaming sword from the gate of paradise, and re-opens it freely for man's return. Our sonship rests now on a new basis, — even the Person of our Mediator: we are "all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus." "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." It is the spirit "of His Son" whom God sends forth into our hearts crying "Abba" Father. Least of all should we forget this to-day, when we have just come from Olivet, where we have witnessed His glorious ascension, and recalled His words, "I ascend unto My Father and unto your Father." Yes, first His Father, and then and therefore ours.

II. I pass to the second thought suggested by the text, — that, namely, which relates to the fatherhood of man.

“I bow my knees,” says the apostle, “to the Father, from whom every family on earth is named.” Behold the dignity and glory of the family! It is heavenly and divine in its origin. Like the tabernacle in the wilderness, it is made after the pattern of things in the mount of God; for see what the apostle says: Every family here derives its name from the Father there, as every father derives his title from the same source. This earthly fatherhood, then, is the human reflex of the fatherhood of God, and, as such, is an integral part of the original image of God, in which man was made. Defaced, indeed, it was by the fall; but it is restored by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. What, then, is the dignity, yea, the divinity, of the parental relation! And how great reason is there that men should take heed how they exercise it — how they fulfil the holy office of “father!” We speak of the Christian ministry as the sacred office, and so it is most sacred; but it is not the only sacred office: and that line which we draw between things sacred and secular, is wrongly drawn if it do not include the family in the former.

My brethren, the office of father or mother is a

sacred office, and you who occupy it are consecrated of God to a holy priesthood. See that you magnify your office! Have always printed in your remembrance, into how high and holy and solemn a ministry you are called; that is to say, to represent in your person to your family the Great Father of all; to be to those dependent on you, as far as human weakness will allow, such a father as He is. Ah! how this heavenly jewel is trampled under foot of men, who, instead of fathers, are tyrants, practising in the noonday of Christianity the unkindness, or the neglect, or the harshness, or even the cruelty, which belong to polytheism and infidelity. Let our text supply to us a stimulus to be faithful to our holy office as parents, and to stint neither care nor prayer, that our families here on earth may be, at least in some faint degree, a reflex of the families in heaven.

There is a little sheet of water at the eastern end of the Yosemite valley, in which one may see, if we visit it before the sun has touched it, a most wonderful and entrancing sight: in the surface of that tiny lake, polished to an almost preternatural smoothness by the hand of God Himself, is mirrored the whole grand amphitheatre of gigantic walls and towering cliffs, varying from two thousand to five thousand feet in height,—the entire valley of the Yosemite, some eight

miles in length, and with it the over-arching sky, reflected with absolute exactness, and with such vividness that every tint of the forest, and every crevice and stain in the cliffs, and every hue of the floating clouds, is distinctly reproduced. We may not hope ever to see an earthly family which shall be such a mirror as that, which shall reflect the families in heaven with any such perfectness as that. But surely our earthly families may reflect *something* of heaven — something of the peace and the joy and the love which reign in the many mansions above. Surely we may at least by God's blessing so order our homes that they need not always be like a turbid lake, so tossed and so unquiet as never to show *any* reflection of heaven.

III. I come finally to the third reflection suggested by our text, — the perpetuity of the family. "Every family in heaven and on earth:" — then there are families in heaven, differing, no doubt, greatly from those on earth, but still preserving the essential elements of the family. If this be so, we may say of the family that it is an enduring institution, resting on the fundamental principles of humanity, and that, as the gospel gives absolute assurance of the immortality of the soul, so it gives also the assurance of the perpetuity of the family. What a revelation of the blessed state of the redeemed! Here is something more than the recog-

dition of friends : here is family life transfigured and perpetuated in heaven !

The most beautiful thing on this earth is the spectacle of a happy Christian family. It is a relic, the most precious relic, of paradise. The purest and the deepest and the most refreshing wells of joy in this world of heat and dust and thirst are those which lie beneath the dear rooftree of home. We Anglo-Saxons boast of our word "home," and of the thought it embodies, as something peculiarly our own. But let us not give to race that which belongs to mankind. The thought of home, with all the precious things it signifies, belongs to our common humanity. It is dear to all races and to all kindreds of men.

But how often are those sweet well-springs embittered or dried up ! A son is wayward and rebellious, and wanders far from God. A daughter is frivolous and vain, and goes astray. Sin stains the purity of the home, or misfortune crushes the head of the family, or death smites down one of its members ; and so it comes to pass that the ideal of the family is never attained in this world of blight and rust and hail-storm. But it shall be attained yonder ! There are families in heaven, and all elements of disturbance and decay are there removed. What a strong consolation this thought affords, also, to those of us whose families are breaking up

or broken up, scattering or scattered. Follow for a little distance the fortunes of a family. They gather, we will suppose, in a bright country-home, father and mother, sons and daughters, all bright and hopeful and happy, — the young full of enthusiasm for the untried voyage before them, the old full of joy in the happiness and hope of the young. A few years pass, and again we see them gathered, it may be, in the same scene; but how changed already! Lines — the well-known lines of care — traced on the brow, and gray hairs here and there, tell the story of battle and bereavement in the experience of life. There is a vacant chair or more, and the tears on more than one cheek bear silent witness to the sad associations that the family reunion recalls. Years roll on; and one after the other is missed, till the number up there is greater than the number here, and the home-centre must be sought beyond the river. At length only one is left, a lonely pilgrim, tottering under the weight of years, and steadily approaching the brink of the cold, dark stream. To such a one, how sweet this gospel-message about families in heaven! to know that, fast as the Christian family breaks up here, it is re-forming in a better home there; and to be assured that the life there shall not be an utterly new and strange one — that this at least will remain, the family.

Such thoughts suit well the season which is consecrated to the contemplation of the ascended Lord. We would fain obey the injunction of our Church, and "in heart and mind thither ascend" to the glory of the better land. His own words come to help our contemplation: let these be remembered, though every thing else I have said to-day shall be forgotten. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

XVI.

THE VISION OF THE THRONE.

(FOR TRINITY SUNDAY.)

"Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."
— REVELATION iv. 2.

THAT sublime passage, which is the appointed epistle for Trinity Sunday, naturally attracts our earnest and reverent attention to-day. We feel indeed constrained to exclaim as we ponder it, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!" and yet I think we will feel also, that there are some things here which we may lay hold of, — some very precious things which we must not let slip; for even this mystic and mysterious Apocalypse is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Come we, then, to the study of this passage, not as wise and learned men, but as little children, with ear attent and heart ready to receive the instruction which it suggests; and do Thou, O Spirit of all Truth, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us, open now our eyes, that we may see wondrous things in Thy Word!

I. St. John was caught up as through an open door into heaven; "and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sitting on the throne." I find here a truth high and glorious. Above all the strife and discord and confusion of this world, above those thrones and dominions which caricature royalty and pervert justice, above the Neros and Domitians and all their brood of lesser tyrants, there is a Dominion, an Authority, a Throne which is Supreme. Let men say and do what they will, in heaven there is a throne, and it ruleth over all forevermore. The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; but "the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Yes, in face of the cheerless materialism and the black atheism of our time, we rest in the assurance that the world is not without a ruler; that it is not rolling on from age to age, like a ship without a pilot; but that it has a Guide, a King, whose eternal throne is established on high. And on that throne, One is sitting.

Far back in the feeble dawn of civilization, when polytheism, with all its superstitions, prevailed over the whole earth, there was one race of people, and only one, among whom this sublime truth of monotheism was proclaimed: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." And now in the noonday of civilization and science, when man's conception of the extent of the universe has been

enlarged to almost an infinite degree, when to the patient eye of the astronomer many doors have been opened in heaven, and in each of its thousand chambers suns and systems have been unveiled, the Christian Church points to this vision of the apostle, and affirms that there is one throne, whence they all are governed, and one God, who sits on that throne.

This conception of the universe as a unit, governed from one centre and on one grand economy of law, is indeed the modern scientific conception. This is the proudest achievement of science, to have demonstrated the unity and universality of the great laws of the Kosmos. Step by step, science has passed from chaos to order, from the manifold to the simple, from phenomena to the laws which govern phenomena, and from these again to those great ultimate principles or forces which explain all law, until at last, in the doctrine of the correlation of forces, the topmost stone in the edifice has been laid, the last term in the series has been reached, and science has grasped the grand conception of one universal omnipresent energy. We may say that in each subkingdom of nature the scientific seers have at last affirmed this unity as the result of their visions. The naturalist, the botanist, the chemist, the astronomer, the philosopher, all in one chorus

declare of the several kingdoms of their investigations, "I beheld a throne, and One sitting on the throne." And from these separate conclusions, science has risen to the grand generalization that there is a higher kingdom which embraces all, which ruleth over all, and that One sitteth on that throne.

But all these are only so many echoes of the truth embodied in the vision of the throne which St. John saw. The Christian Church has for nineteen centuries proclaimed as a revelation what science in the evening of the ages, by slow and painful induction, has at last demonstrated as a scientific truth, — the unity of cosmical law. And there is, moreover, this important difference between the two. Modern science and philosophy (like those of ancient Greece), in the persons of a considerable proportion of its representatives, hold to a pantheistic monotheism, — a conception which is utterly destitute of comfort or inspiration; while the disciple of Christ beholds on the throne of the universe a personal Ruler, a personal God.

2. Again: whereas St. John saw before the great throne "a sea of glass like unto crystal," this, I suppose, was intended to express the "majestic repose and ethereal majesty" of the throne of God. The thrones of earth rest on the troubled waves of a treacherous sea, — a sea which may at

any moment be swept by the stormy wind and tempest, and beneath whose waves these thrones and dominions one by one disappear. But before the throne of God is "a sea of glass," image of calmness and repose; a sea whose smooth surface is never ruffled, whose transparent depths are never disturbed. Such is the government of God over His universe, not capricious, uncertain, or changeful, but "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." No storms can ruffle it, no tempests disturb it: it remains forevermore serene.

3. Listen again to the record of the vision: "He that sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone." Here are particulars which concern the character of the Monarch of the universe. Two appearances are described, — the jasper, and the sardine or cornelian stone. The crystalline brightness of the one would seem to be a symbol of holiness, and the fiery red of the other a symbol of justice; so that we have here set forth the truth, that He who sits upon the throne is a God of glorious holiness, and justice terrible. This description is intensified by the declaration that "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices."

That the Monarch and Ruler of the universe is a God of holiness and justice, is a truth of which the moral constitution of man bears abundant

testimony, and upon which the moral order of society, of the world, and of all worlds, absolutely depends. And he who beholds on the throne a being other than this, is the victim of delusion. But it must be confessed, this is so far a vision, which sinful man cannot contemplate with other than feelings of apprehension and alarm. I turn my eyes toward that throne, and dazzled by the insufferable light of its holiness, awed by the fiery appearance of its justice, I exclaim, —

“So vile am I, how dare I hope to stand
In the pure glory of that heavenly land,
Before the whiteness of that throne appear?”

I see the lightnings leaping forth from the throne; I hear the dreadful sound of the thunders and the articulate voices of justice and judgment; and like the prophet I cry, “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” If this were all the vision, it were one which we would not willingly look upon. But it is not all, for the record proceeds, —

4. “And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.” Ah! here is a feature of the vision, which, to us sinful men, must be of all others the most delightful to contemplate. Is your eye dazzled by the jasper bright-

ness of the holiness of Him that sitteth upon the throne? Is your heart awed by the fiery appearance of His justice? Do you tremble at the lightnings and thunderings and voices which proceed from the throne? Then lift your eyes to the rainbow which encompasses the throne. It is in sight like unto an emerald. The predominating color is that which is most grateful and most restful to the dazzled or wearied eye. (We need not wonder at this. Niebuhr and other travellers describe white rainbows.) God set His bow in the sky as the sign of His covenant of mercy with Noah and his posterity; and ever since, it has been to men the most beautiful and the most attractive object in the natural world,—a symbol of peace and blessing. Now, we may safely infer that He has given us this vision of the rainbow round the eternal and glorious throne on high, as a sign that His holiness and justice are ever encircled by His covenant of grace and mercy, of peace and reconciliation.

Fidelity to truth requires us to preach to men the holiness and justice of God, and to forewarn them of His judgments upon the ungodly; but when we have done this, we are given the inestimable privilege of telling of the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus, whereby sin is forgiven and reconciliation assured to every one that believeth. Yes!

Though clouds and darkness are round about Him, though justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, yet (blessed be His name!) there is a rainbow round about the throne. Thither let the trembling sinner's eye be turned, and let its soft and gentle radiance beam into his heart the assurance of grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. And we who are His disciples, and who cherish the hope of redemption through His blood — when hours of darkness and doubt come upon us ; when, overwhelmed by the sense of our unworthiness and our manifold short-comings, we are ready to despair of standing accepted before the throne of His holiness and glory, — let the memory of this vision come back to re-assure us, while we recall the words, "There is a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

But a question arises, which surely is a proper one to be asked and answered, What is the genesis of this rainbow ?

When we see a bright bow spanning the heavens after a storm, we know its genesis ; when we stand beneath the great cataract of Niagara, and see the many rainbows formed in the rising cloud of spray, each the arc of a different circle, from a different centre, or the circular horizontal iris lying on the surface of the water, in each case we can discover

how the beautiful phenomenon was produced. Natural it is, then, to inquire what is the genesis of that rainbow round about the eternal throne? How was it formed?

Now, we find no answer to this question in the passage before us. But when we consider the agency of the sun in the formation of the natural rainbow, and remember that Christ Jesus is spoken of in the lofty imagery of prophecy as the "Sun of Righteousness," is it fanciful to conceive that the rays which form that heavenly rainbow which spans the great throne of God's holiness and justice, proceed from Him?—from that same Jesus who said when on earth, "I am the light of the world"? Yes, assuredly this is the genesis of that heavenly bow of promise, that covenant-sign of mercy. We find the cause of that beautiful phenomenon in the true heavens, in the incarnation, the atonement, and the perpetual intercession of the Son of God.

In reaching this conclusion, the Scriptures themselves lead us by the hand to the very end. For do they not say of our blessed Redeemer, "He is our hope;" "He is our peace;" and "God was in Christ—reconciling the world unto Himself;" "in Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins;" and "through Him we have access by one spirit unto the Father;" "we

have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus"? In the light of such words of the divine revelation as these, we can hold no other opinion, but that the bow of grace, mercy, and peace which encircles the throne of holiness and justice, is formed by the rays of light which proceed from the manger, the cross, and the sepulchre of Christ.

Thousands see the beautiful symbol of covenant-mercy around the throne, who have no true ideas, or at least very feeble and imperfect ideas, of its genesis; even as the natural rainbow was admired by men for thousands of years before Antonio de Dominis discovered its true theory in 1611. (He was archbishop of Spalatro, and became a Protestant, and died in a dungeon of the Inquisition 1622.) But assuredly we should be inexcusable, now that the gospel has revealed to us the true explanation of this bright symbol of peace, if we failed to recognize in Christ Jesus its source and its cause. It is a confirmation of this view, that the apostle beheld in the midst of the throne, "A lamb, and it had been slain," thus connecting the redeeming death of Christ with the glories of the eternal throne.

5. One more feature of this vision I notice: "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God."

Here we have the symbol of the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold energy, — “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness and holy fear.” . . . Fire is His symbol, because it is His to enlighten the conscience, and to warm the affections, His also to purge and to purify, and His to judge and to consume.

The vision would have been incomplete without this symbol of the Holy Ghost, “the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who, with the Father and the Son together, is worshipped and glorified — who spake by the prophets,” and who now abideth in the Church to guide, to comfort, to enlighten, to sanctify. The vision, I say, would have been incomplete, because its design clearly is to teach us, not only in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, but also, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the Eternal Trinity, or Tripersonality of the Deity.

On that high and awful throne, “One was sitting.” Nowhere is the unity of God so emphasized, and never is the truth, that there is one God, and one only, so clearly and decisively maintained, as when the doctrine of the Trinity is confessed. But there is in this one God a threefold relation, — three subsistences in one substance, — as there is

in man a threefold distinction of intellect and will and conscience, or, again, of body, soul, and spirit.

So we see, in this vision, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost; and in each of these self-revelations, the one God is brought very near to His creatures, each performing offices most gracious, most precious, most indispensable.

6. Time does not permit me to dwell on what the apostle heard when rapt into the heavens; but I may simply say, he heard three hymns of praise, — first, a hymn in celebration of the Eternal Being of God, from the four living creatures, the cherubim, personal ministers (as I suppose) of the divine government. It was a perpetual Trisagion, — which ceased not day nor night, — “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is, and is to come.”

Then, secondly, a hymn in celebration of the Creation, from the four and twenty elders, representative of the Church in heaven and on earth, falling down before the Almighty, casting their crowns before the throne, and saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Then, thirdly, there follows a hymn in celebration of the redemption. This is called “a new

song ;” and it is sung jointly by the four living beings and the twenty-four elders, falling down before the Lamb, and saying, “Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed men to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ; and hast made them unto our God kings and priests.”

At this, a general chorus of praise bursts from the circling hosts of angels, echoing the song of redemption, saying in a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” And this again is caught up, and prolonged by a yet vaster throng, — “Every creature in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” Thus this perpetual Trisagion and this triple hymn of praise are in harmony with the general character of the vision as a revelation of the Tri-Una-God.

May we have grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity. And while heaven is vocal with the anthems of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, and the vast host of the

redeemed ; yea, while all creation pays its tribute of adoration, — let not our lips be dumb, but let every heart and every voice join in the everlasting Te Deum to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

XVII.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." — ST. MATTHEW xvii. 1, 2.

THE recent general convention of our Church has added to the calendar a feast in commemoration of the transfiguration of Christ, and assigned it to the sixth day of August. It is, however, rather a restoration than an addition, inasmuch as the Feast of the Transfiguration was observed in the Christian Church as early as the middle of the fifth century.

Unlike other prominent events in the life of Christ, the Transfiguration finds no place in the ordinary cycle of art-representations in the early Christian Church. It is represented emblematically in certain mosaics of the sixth and eighth centuries, but it was reserved for Raphael's immortal genius to portray it in a manner worthy of the subject. His noble picture in the Vatican was the apotheosis of his art; but Death snatched the brush from his hand before it was finished, as if Provi-

dence would teach us that no human art or genius, no human tongue or pen, can sufficiently and completely portray that sublime spectacle. In attempting to speak to you to-night upon so lofty a theme, I confess that I am oppressed with a feeling of awe because of its majesty and its difficulty ; although, since it is a part of the revelation of the life of Christ, it is better that we should try at least to understand it, than that we should pass it by altogether.

It was when the Master was in the neighborhood of Cæsarea-Philippi, far away in the north of Palestine, that the event described in the text occurred. To any one visiting the spot, and seeing the stupendous form of snowy Hermon rising before him, till its summit has left the valley eleven thousand feet below, it appears almost certain, it is said, that this was the high mountain to which the Saviour led His chosen disciples when He would be transfigured before them. Picture, then, to your mind what transpired. It is the Sabbath evening. Jesus, with Peter and James and John, begins the ascent. Through a scene of surpassing loveliness they wend their way. At every step the prospect expands, till at length a glorious panorama opens before them, “embracing a great part of Syria, from the sea to Damascus, from the Lebanon and the gorge of the Litany to the mountains of Moab ; or down

the Jordan valley to the Dead Sea ; or over Galilee and Samaria, and on to Jerusalem," all bathed in the splendors of the setting sun. But these sunset glories presently fade. Night falls. The stars one by one shine forth. The moon rises in silvery radiance, reflected back in dazzling beauty from the broad patches of snow on the mountain side. And now what do we see? Jesus bowed in prayer there in the moonlight, His disciples praying with Him a short distance apart, till, overcome by fatigue, they sink in slumber. But what sudden light is that which bursts forth upon the scene, hiding by its dazzling brilliancy all the glories of the moonlit night? The disciples are wakened by the splendor, and their astonished eyes behold a marvellous sight. Jesus is transfigured before them. His face shines with the brightness of the noonday sun ; His raiment is white and glistening ; and as they gaze in a transport of awe, behold ! two shining forms appear with Him in glory, whom they, by the intuition which is given to the spirit in moments of ecstasy, recognize to be none other than Moses and Elias, — Moses, the lawgiver and leader of God's ancient people ; Moses, who had stood on the summit of Sinai, and talked with God ; and Elias, at whose word the heavens were shut and opened, who called down fire from heaven at will, and who was at last translated to heaven by a char-

iot of fire: these two men — he does not call them angels, for the Bible distinguishes carefully between glorified saints and angels — were seen talking with Jesus concerning His decease, which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. The apostles gaze in wonder and adoration, till presently there comes a bright cloud, which enwraps in its folds of light the three figures. It is the Shechinah, and the apostles fear as they see the face of Christ and the faces of Moses and Elias disappearing within it. And now from out that cloud of awful glory comes a voice,—the same that Moses heard on Sinai, the same of which the prophet Habakkuk said, “O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid: . . . my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself,” — saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.”

Such was the scene of the Transfiguration. If, now, we inquire as to its purpose, that inquiry branches into three. What was its intent touching Jesus? What was its intent touching Moses and Elias? What was its intent touching Peter, James, and John? To the first of these we answer, with humility, and yet with some degree of confidence, it was intended to strengthen and brace the spirit of Jesus Christ for the solemn and awful work which lay before Him, culminating in Gethsemane

and Calvary. If it is true that He "learned obedience by the things which He suffered," if it is true that He was "made perfect through suffering," then we need not be surprised that at each step of His human development there came to him a deeper knowledge of the meaning and scope of His work, a clearer apprehension of His divine mission. If, again, an angel came to minister unto Him after the Temptation in the wilderness; if another angel came to strengthen Him during the agony in Gethsemane, — we need not be surprised if the presence of Moses and Elias — if this whole scene of transcendent glory — gave strength and refreshment to the soul of our High Priest, as He girded Himself to enter into the valley of sacrifice and suffering.

As regards the purpose of the Transfiguration with reference to Moses and Elias, it is difficult for us to speak with any degree of positiveness. Remembering, however, what St. Peter tells us, that the angels bend over the mystery of redemption very much as the cherubim bent over the mercy-seat on the ark, desiring "to look into" its secret meaning, we may infer that glorified saints, such as Moses and Elias, must have felt the most earnest and absorbing desire to understand the mystery of the atonement which Christ was about to make for their sins, and for the sins of the whole world. For them the Transfiguration must have

been a new revelation of the wisdom and glory of God, in the consummation of His eternal purpose to redeem a ruined world. To one of them, we may venture to say, it came as a long-deferred answer to a petition made more than a millennium before. Moses had dared to ask a great thing, when once the cloudy pillar descended, and rested at the door of the Tabernacle in the wilderness: "I beseech Thee," said he, "shew me Thy glory." And the Lord had answered, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: and I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen." But now the holy man of God is summoned from his rest in the spiritual world, and, standing in the clift of the Rock of Ages, he beholds the very face of God,—the brightness of Jehovah's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

So far as the three apostolic witnesses of the Transfiguration were concerned, its intent is perfectly clear. Bewildered by the strange announcement which had lately been made to them, that their Master, whom at last they had come to believe was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," was to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and

crucified and slain, their faith was sorely tried, and was in danger of total eclipse. They could not grasp the conception of a suffering Messiah. It was an offence to them. It seemed utterly at variance with the glorious offices predicted of Him, utterly inconsistent with the divine glory which they had seen already in the person and works of Jesus. And so they are taken up into the holy Mount, and shown the great lawgiver and the great prophet of Israel engaged in ecstatic converse with their glorified Master concerning the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. The lesson was plain ; they had misread the prophecies : the Messiah of Moses and the prophets must be a suffering, dying Messiah. And this Jesus, whom they are almost ready to forsake, because He tells them He is to die the shameful death of the cross, God the Father, on the Mount of Transfiguration, crowns with honor and glory, "because of the suffering of death," saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye Him."

Let us now draw a little nearer to this mysterious scene, and ask ourselves what is its significance ?

1. In the first place it marks the topmost step in the progressive glorification of the manhood of Jesus Christ. His incarnation and His whole life

upon earth was a humiliation ; but side by side with that humiliation, there was going on a process of glorification. From the time when the star led the wise men of the East to the spot where Jesus was born, down to the moment when He was transfigured before the disciples, His person had been the centre of a widening circle of epiphanies, manifesting forth the glory which was progressively unfolded within the Tabernacle of His humanity. Angels and shepherds and sages, prophets, priests, and holy women of God, uttered the praise of the Infant Christ. He increased in wisdom. He grew to man's estate. On the banks of the Jordan, the Baptist pointed to Him as the Lamb of God. When He went to His baptism, the heavens were opened, and there came a voice heard by Himself alone, and designed for His instruction alone, saying, "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." At the same spot the Holy Ghost descended and rested upon Him, in bodily semblance like a dove. Then, when taught by the heavenly vision He had entered into the full realization of His divine Sonship, He wrought miracle after miracle, and manifested forth His glory, till at length there came the great confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And now, last of all, and as the crown of all these epiphanies of His unfolding

glory, comes the transfiguration on the holy Mount, marking, as I have said, the topmost step in His progressive glorification. — What is it that we see, my brethren, when in thought we transport ourselves to the slope of Hermon, and stand with the apostles while Jesus is transfigured? The fashion of His countenance is altered; His face shines with a radiance like the sun itself; His raiment becomes white and glistening. It is as if that divine glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and which He had put off, as a king puts off his crown, when He stooped to redeem the world, was now again circling His brow. It is as if that “Form of God,” which had been His from eternity, and which He had laid aside when He entered upon His work of redemption to take “the form of a servant,” He now resumed. It is as if the Father had for this one moment of His earthly career put upon His shoulders again the robes of His glory and of His Deity, that Moses and Elias might worship Him as the eternal Son of God. But we shall, I think, come nearer to the true reading of this scene if we regard this glorification of Jesus on the Mount as the natural apotheosis of His consecrated humanity. In that case the Transfiguration will mark the normal development of a godly and a holy life in the person of the spotless Son of Man. He rose to that

height of glory on Mount Hermon because of the inner power of His holy life, because of the transfiguring virtue of His consecrated soul ; and when we behold Him irradiated with light, "clothing Himself with light as with a garment," and standing with glorified saints, we witness the natural climax of His holy and spotless humanity. And now see the doors of eternal glory open before the Son of Man : He has only to enter in, to step up from the summit of Hermon into the presence of God Himself, and to sit down in glory forever ! But instead of this, what does He do ? He puts aside this possible glorification ; He comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration ; He leaves all that glory which He might have had with the angels of God and the glorified saints, and descends into the valley of humiliation, into this desert of sin and sorrow and suffering, into the dark and gloomy depths of Gethsemane and Calvary, in order to redeem a world !

2. The Transfiguration may be looked upon as the inauguration of the New Covenant. As on rugged Sinai was inaugurated the law which proved a ministration of death, so on snowy Hermon, amid a scene of exquisite natural beauty, was inaugurated the gospel by that voice from the excellent glory.

Look once more at what occurred on the Mount :

there is the venerable representative of the ancient law in the person of Moses ; there is the majestic figure of Elijah, representing the noble company of the prophets ; and these two are seen in no antagonism to Christ, but in perfect harmony with Him, teaching us thereby that the Old Testament and the Old Economy, the law of Moses and all that pertained thereto, led up to, and prepared the way for, the New Dispensation of grace, mercy, and peace which was in Christ Jesus our Lord. Moreover, these two representatives, one of the law, and the other of the prophets, are manifestly in a position of subordination to Christ. They appear as His attendant ministers, at once to bear witness to Him, and to learn from Him the mystery of redemption. It is most significant, that just as the voice comes from above, declaring Jesus Christ to be the beloved Son of God, in whom He is well pleased, Moses and Elias vanish from the sight of the apostles. The law and the prophets give way to Christ and His New Dispensation. "Christ is the end of the law." "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Having borne their testimony, those holy men disappear, leaving "Jesus only," as at once the Prophet, the Priest, and the King of His Church. The voice of God proclaims Him the Head and Lord of all. "HEAR YE HIM." You have heard and obeyed Moses, you have

heard and obeyed the prophets: now hear and obey Christ the Son of God. "God, who by divers portions and in divers manners spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." Surely, here on the summit of the Mount of the Transfiguration one cannot but see the inauguration of the New Dispensation of grace, mercy, and peace in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

3. But, again, the Transfiguration represents to us the investiture of Jesus Christ as High Priest. You remember, that, acting under divine direction, Moses had prepared for the high priest of that older dispensation certain sacred robes, — the robe and the ephod made of blue and gold and scarlet and fine linen, with its onyx stones set in the shoulder, upon each of which there were graven the names of six of the tribes of Israel; and then the breastplate, with its twelve precious stones, each bearing the name of one of the tribes; that when the high priest entered into the high place, he might bear on his shoulders and on his heart the names of the people of God.

Now, if you consider that the evangelist says not only that the face of Christ did shine as the sun, but that His raiment was changed, and became white and glistening, the thought suggests itself that the Father was now robing His Son in the

sacred garments of His holy priesthood in which He was to offer the great sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and, bearing upon His heart the names of His people, to pass through the veil—that is to say, His flesh—into the Holy of holies in the heavens, now to appear in the presence of God for us. It is confirmatory of this view, that the prominent subject, in fact the only subject, of conversation between Christ and these heavenly visitants from the spiritual world, was His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion, which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. And if you will carefully study the narrative, you will find that from this point on to the end, Christ's prophetic office appears to recede more and more, while His priestly office comes into prominence. From Hermon He descended into the valley of humiliation, and moved right on to the altar of sacrifice, even His cross on Calvary. Invested on the Mount with the garments which symbolized His heavenly and divine priesthood, from this time His face is toward Jerusalem,—toward the altar of sacrifice, where He was to make the great atonement for the sins of the whole world.

4. This leads me to remark that the Transfiguration is above all designed to exhibit to us the transcendent value of the sufferings and death of Christ. I have already called your attention to

the fact that it was of "His decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem," that Moses and Elias spake with Christ upon the holy Mount. Those heavenly visitants, coming down to earth for a brief space from the realms of light and peace and rest, were absorbed in the contemplation of one event, and that event was the death of Christ.

In the Basilica at Ravenna, there is a mosaic of the sixth century representing in emblematical form the Transfiguration of Christ,—a jewelled cross set in a circle of blue studded with golden stars, in the midst of which appears the face of Christ, the Saviour of the world; while from the cloud close by is thrust forth a divine hand that points to the cross. Those early artists were right in their reading of this sublime event. The Transfiguration sets the cross of Christ in the centre, surrounds it with a radiant firmament of God's promises and of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and shows us the hand of God Himself, emerging from the cloud of glory, and pointing to the cross, as though God the Father would say to man what John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The value of the cross of Christ,—this is the central truth of the Transfiguration; a truth which the Church can never afford for one instant—I will not say to forget, or to lose sight of, but—

to permit to be blurred or obscured in the faintest degree. Thank God that our own Church has set on high this doctrine of a crucified Redeemer! Every time we gather round the holy table of our Lord, to celebrate the mysteries of His death, we are taught that Christ "made there, on the cross, by His one offering of Himself, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." As we stand on the Mount of the Transfiguration, then, and see in thought what the apostles saw in fact, we seem to catch the echo of the words of Saul of Tarsus, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

5. I pass on to point out the prophetic significance of the Transfiguration. Standing on Hermon with these three apostles, a long vista stretches out before us into the distant future, including in its scope that great day when the Son of God shall take to Himself His power, His mighty power, in order to reign. His kingdom has come at last; and what is the manner of it? It is a kingdom of redeemed men, — of men who stand like Moses and Elias with Christ in glory, not only redeemed, not only delivered from sin and suffering and sorrow and trial and pain, but transformed and transfigured with that same glory by which the person of Jesus is inwrapped. Yes, these glorified saints

on the holy Mount represent the glorified Church of the Redeemed. They have left death and corruption and decay behind. Their very bodies are transfigured, according to that great word of the apostle, "Who shall change this body of our humiliation, and fashion it like unto the body of His glory?" Daniel, the prophet, long centuries before Christ, predicted the resurrection, — "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," — and he adds, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament." The Master also Himself, speaking of that coming kingdom, said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father;" and St. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory;" and in the Revelation of St. John we hear the voice of the glorious Lord Himself in language which carries with it a reminiscence of the scene on the Mount: "They shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy." Thus the transfigured body of Jesus Christ is the image of the transfiguration of the bodies of all the redeemed in the kingdom and glory of our Father. For "this body of our humiliation" shall not inherit the kingdom in its present form of flesh and blood, with all its imperfections, but "shall be changed," shall be trans-

formed, shall be transfigured after the pattern and example of the body of Christ's glory.

6. Finally, the Transfiguration has a symbolic as well as a prophetic import. It symbolizes the transformation and transfiguration of our spirits, our whole reasonable, moral, and spiritual nature into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord. St. Paul says, addressing himself to Christian people, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed." This last word is the same used by the evangelist in describing the Transfiguration;¹ and it might be rendered, "Be ye transfigured, — be ye transfigured by the renewing of your mind." We find the same word in that great passage in the second Epistle to the Corinthians: "We all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory." So, as I gaze at the transfigured Christ, I am taught that I, too, ought to be transfigured — my life, my affections, my aims, my hopes, my aspirations, both "the hidden man" of the heart and the outward visible life — transfigured into the image of Christ. I ought to put off "the old man" with his deeds, and to put on "the new man," which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.

¹ Both the Authorized and the Revised Versions fail to bring out this correspondence in either of the passages quoted.

Let me now, from a number of impressive lessons which the subject affords, gather three or four. And the first is this : if we desire to behold the glory of the transfigured Redeemer, we must climb with Him the mount of prayer. Jesus led His disciples up the slope of Hermon "to pray." It was not the whole people of Israel that beheld the Transfiguration of Christ ; nor even the twelve apostles, but a chosen few ; and these few must gird up their loins, and follow Him up the holy Mount. My brother, do you desire to behold Jesus Christ transfigured ? Go, then, climb the steep ascent of prayer and holy contemplation. Gird up your loins for an arduous and toilsome path. Put forth all your energies. Concentrate your thoughts. Go with your Lord apart from the world, and in the silence and solitude of the mountain-top you shall behold His glory. You will never see in Jesus any thing save a human teacher, or, at best, you will never understand His glory except as a theory, or as a mere dogma of the intellect, until in fervent prayer, and deep and earnest contemplation, you follow Him on to the Mount of Transfiguration.

Learn also from this great scene on Hermon the metamorphic power of prayer. As Jesus prayed, He was transfigured. Had He not prayed, He would not have been transfigured. Even the holy

Jesus could only be transfigured as the result of fervent prayer. Consider, therefore, the metamorphic, transfiguring power of a life of prayer. The face of Moses is not the only one which has shone with a light caught upon the Mount from long communion with God. St. Stephen is not the only faithful witness of Christ upon whose features a life of prayer has stamped an angelic impress. There are holy men and women, even in this our practical age, and amid the practical duties of life, whose faces have caught a radiance from above, whose spirits are manifestly transformed, who already in this mortal life are seen walking with Christ in the white robes of self-renouncing, self-forgetting love. If we ask the secret of this new transfiguration, the answer can only be, They are men and women who breathe the atmosphere of fervent prayer. And many a time in the case of departing saints we behold this metamorphic power of prayer, — behold it with the eye of sense. I have seen the face of a dying servant of Christ lit up, whether by a light from the unseen world, or by a radiance shining out from within, I could not tell ; but in either case, it was a kind of transfiguration which only those attain who have been often with Jesus on the mountain-top of prayer. •

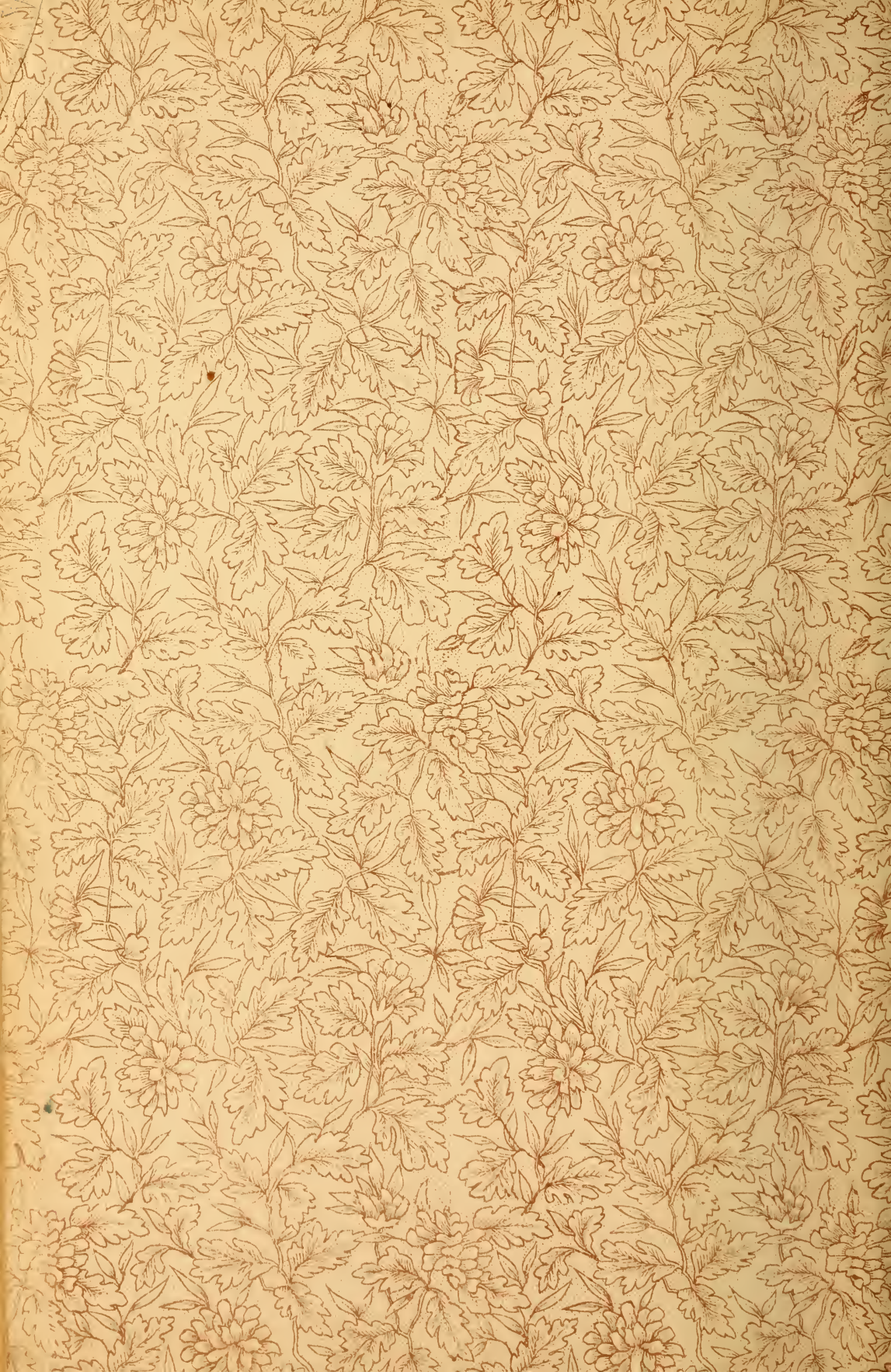
Another lesson which comes out distinctly here is, that consecration to the path of suffering is the

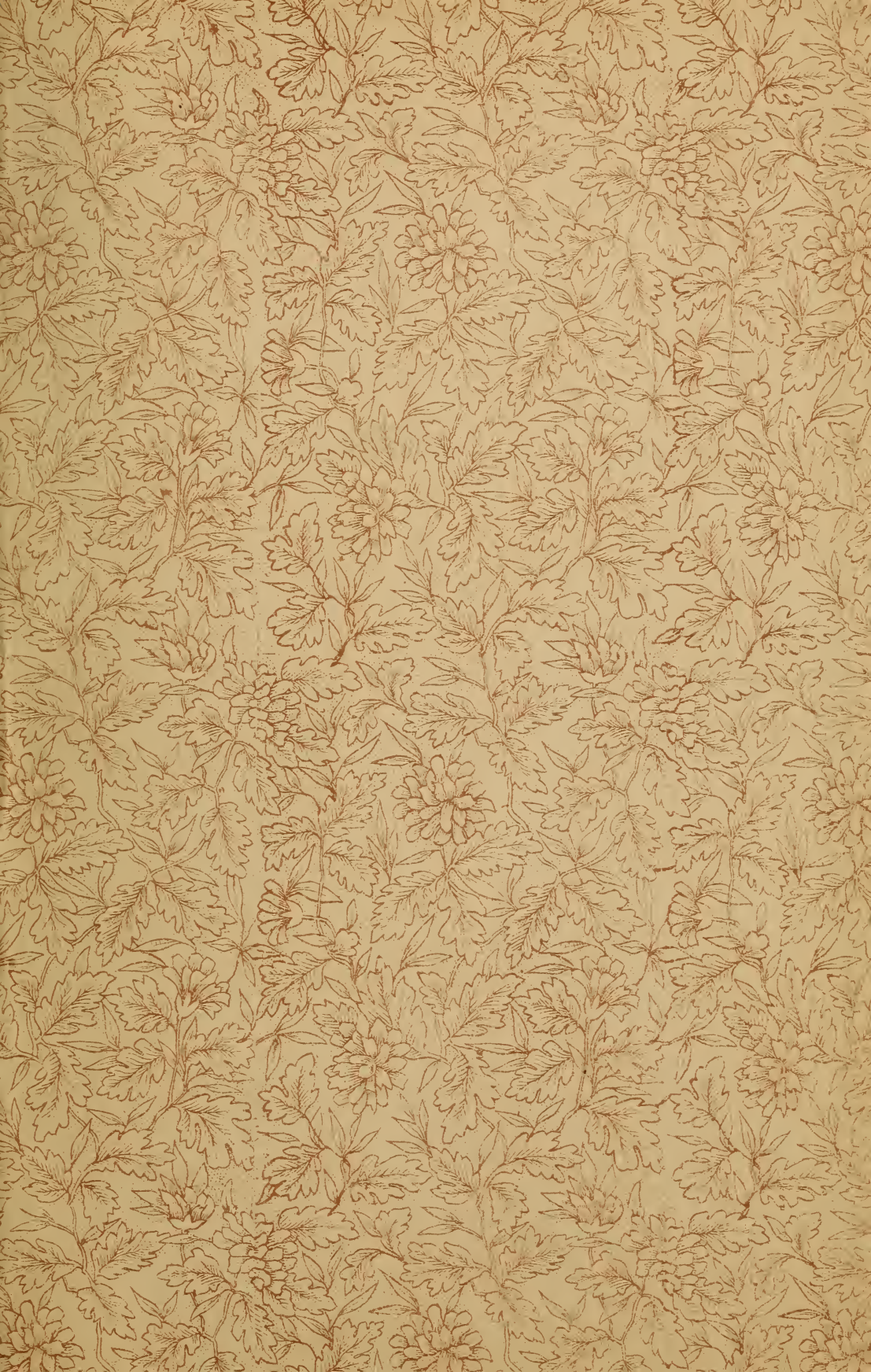
preparation for transfiguration. Brethren, how much of suffering and of sorrow is there in this world ! and how prone are we to think it strange, yea mysterious, that God's chosen and faithful people should be required to tread that path ! Study this transfiguration scene, and you will perceive that His consecration to the path of suffering was, for Jesus Christ, the preparation for His Transfiguration. It was immediately after He had taken His disciples apart, and told them of His purpose to go up to Jerusalem to suffer and to die : it was then, while His soul was stirred to its depths in the contemplation of His passion, that Jesus was transfigured on the Mount. So have we seen it, how often in human life, — some faithful servant of God treading the path of suffering, of affliction, and of sorrow, and we could not understand it, till God showed us that He was, by that means, preparing His servant for being transfigured after the image of Christ ! And as the years have rolled by, we have seen how suffering has wrought upon that countenance the likeness of the Master, and have been constrained to confess that the glorious image of Christ would not otherwise have been developed in this servant of God. Oh the mystery of suffering, the mystery of sorrow, the mystery of bereavement ! Oh the mystery of loneliness and of affliction in this world ! But see, it vanishes like

the morning mist, as we discover that they who tread the path of suffering are preparing for the Mount of Transfiguration. This interprets for us the apostles' assurance that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

In conclusion, let us learn from this scene on the Mount the true relation of the contemplative to the active life. Peter would fain have taken up his abode on a spot so near to heaven. He would build there three tabernacles, to detain the heavenly visitants with Jesus. "It is good to be here," said he. But he wist not what he said. They must descend — Jesus and His disciples — to do the work which the Father had appointed them. Already at the foot of the Mount there was an afflicted father with his demoniac boy, waiting to be healed. What a lesson is there here for us! We cannot spend our lives on the mountain-top of vision, or of ecstasy, or of contemplation. "It is good to be here," says the mystic, "beholding the vision of the glory of God." "It is good to be here," says the ascetic, "apart from the world, disciplining the soul, striving to attain purity of heart." "It is good to be here," says the student, "revelling in the contemplation of the Divine, beholding the glory of God in history, in philosophy, in revelation." But we may not thus spend our lives. The voice of God calls

us down to grapple with the problems and the duties which wait on every side. Sin is here ; sorrow is here ; darkness is here ; unbelief is here. If God has revealed to us the glory of His Son, it is not that we should give our lives up to its contemplation, but that we should gain thereby inspiration and strength to tread the path of duty or of suffering, — that we should consecrate ourselves to the work of lightening the darkness, and lessening the suffering, and cleansing the defilement, of the world in which we live.





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